THE COMICS NEWS FANZINE

BEMZA

30p

MORE READING
THAN EVER!

BEM-21 November 1978

incorporating Fantasy Trader

editor & publisher: Martin Lock

consulting editor: Mike Cruden

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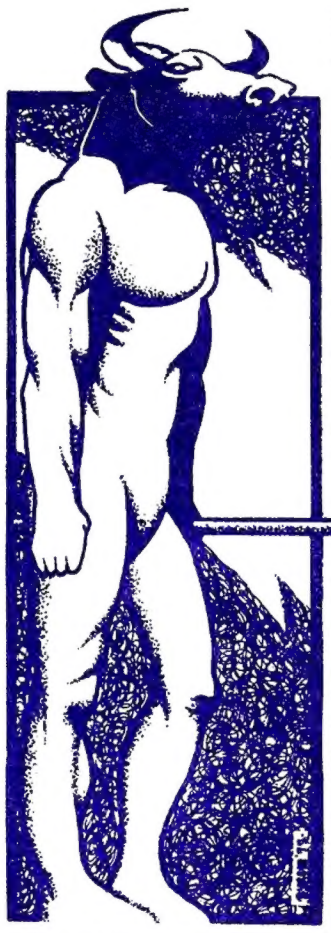
Loz Bowkett: 24; Dave Byrom: 2 (L), 25 (T); Martin Dutton: 21; Phil Elliott: 28 (R); Hunt Emerson: 11; Martin S. Forrest: FT cover; Dave Hornsby: 2 (M), 15; Alan Hunter: 10 (M); Paul Jay: FT page 2; Peter Jones: 28 (L); Rob MacGillivray: 10 (R); Black Jimmy Marshall: 7; Joe Matthews: 10 (T); Mike Matthews: 9 (M), 22 (T); Harry McAvinchey: 8; Terry Moore: 4, 19 (M), 28 (strip); Philip Morton: 19 (strip); Nick Neocleous: 14; Russ Nicholson: 1, 22 (M), 25 (M); Luke Rainford: 17; Pete Scott: 20; Cameron Smith: 13; Superswipe: 27, FT page 3; Geoff Whittaker: 3 (logo), 9 (T); David M. Windett: 2 (R).

NEWS AT BEM

To celebrate Bem's 21st issue, the idea was to fit in as much reading as possible, along with at least the usual amount of fan art -- and by doing almost every page in the smaller type-size we experimented with last time, we've certainly managed that! I hope those of you who mourned the shortage of reading last time will feel that the balance has been restored, though putting 40% more words on a page adds 40% to the editorial and typing work involved, so to maintain Bem's regular schedule it may not be possible to cram this much in every time.



Reaction to Bem's special Captain Frog comic has been very favourable, for the most part, although a few protests are registered in the Bem lettercol this time. Chris Ash is taking a well-earned rest at the moment, though an article by him should appear next time, if I can persuade him to illustrate it. Other material already on hand includes Bem's token Star Wars article, by a gentleman who wishes to use the name Mark Wordwriter, illustrated in fine style by Russ Nicholson, and also a piece on the grand old man of underground comix, Robert Crumb; whether or not that's in the next issue depends on external forces quite beyond me to predict!

Subscribers to Bem can also expect an opinion piece on "The Prisoner", again illustrated by Russ Nicholson -- but as it's in Fantasy Trader rather than Bem itself, non-subscribers will be missing out there. While Bem's cover price has risen to 30 pence, the subscription rate is still £1.50 for five issues, or 30 pence each, which includes Fantasy Trader. All in all, if you buy Bem but don't subscribe, you're not getting as much for your money as you could (hint hint).

But here's Bem-21, with the return of a long-lost column, the Bem Ballot results, full-page "Thundermole" and "Pencer Trak" strips, the Bem debut of "Gleitzman" who has already had his own newspaper strip and three comics (as Fan-Things readers may know), a new Terry Moore strip, a chunky little article on Moon Knight, an in-depth review of a recent Daredevil among the rest of the regular reviews, the usual columns, and seven pages of letters. If you're wondering about the absence of a certain new column I promised last time -- well, I must confess I mis-counted the number of pages, and "The Worlds of Emlock", as the only non-news page not started on, had to be the one to go. Next time, for sure!

I hope to have Bem-22 out in mid-December; the review deadline is November 10th, while letters intended for publication should reach me at least a week before that -- in fact, the earlier they arrive, the more likely they are to be fitted in to Reaction. So, stick with Bem and, unlike some fanzines, Bem will stick with you! I think that will be a pretty good deal. -MARTIN LOCK

REG USPATOFF

I was re-reading my last column for this magazine, which for the newer recruits I'd better say was over a year ago in issue 14, and I see that format changes were a major talking point even then. A point I made that has never been taken up was the low cost of an extra page of art and story, if it replaced a house ad; adding 3 pages to the current 17 would cost less than half a cent per copy, not a vast sum when prices go up regularly by ten times that!

There are ways around what has now become just about an annual event -- and DC's 50 cent format, with 25 pages of story, was an excellent attempt by Ms Jenette Kahn to avoid the move to 40 cents for the tired old 36 page format. It actually saved DC money, and still worked out as better value per page of story, equivalent in fact to dropping the price of a 35 cent comic to 34 cents. The reason for this was that it still only has one cover--and the slick glossy paper, with good quality printing, makes the cover almost as expensive to have printed as the whole of the insides!

But the Warner Board, if they did in fact stop to consider the facts before casually killing off the much-touted "DC Explosion", were not impressed -- before any sales reports on the 50c format were in, the decision was made to revert to the perilously slim 36 page (including cover) size, at the higher-than-before price of 40 cents. How can that compete on the stands with Marvel's line of "still only 35 cents" titles?

The format climb-down has been rather overshadowed in the parts of the fannish press I keep in touch with by the cancellation of around half DC's titles, fannish favourites such as STAR HUNTERS, ALL STAR, KAMANDI, and SHOWCASE included. Now, this is really no bad thing, in my view, though the timing was positively diabolical. Having 20 regular monthly titles on the stands, a new batch of 10 every fortnight, sounds a good, commercial idea--why confuse the poor comics seller with an ever-changing line-up of titles he, and his customers, have never heard of? While I might debate some of the choices, such as MEN OF WAR, GHOSTS, and SUPER FRIENDS (I'd have kept KAMANDI, STAR HUNTERS and ALL STAR instead, you'll be unsurprised to hear), the idea is basically sound.

If the title cut-back had gone through without the retreat on the format front, it would even have allowed true double feature comics, like Marvel's old TALES OF SUSPENSE and TALES TO ASTONISH --"Our Army At War featuring Sgt Rock and Gravedigger", perhaps, and a teaming of Mike Grell's STARSLAYER project with WARLORD would have seemed logical.

However, it's too late now; yet another attempt at a viable, less slender format has been murdered. Luckily, the Dollar Comics have survived the purge fairly well--the series of Spectaculars has been stopped for the time being, and the dollar SF title STRANGE ADVENTURES died stillborn (which may give WEIRD WAR more of an SF slant than usual for a while), but at least there are still three a month, two of them featuring superhero material, with war and mystery alternating as the third. DC have kept on saying that those thicker anthology titles are all doing well, yet they seem rather slow to add new ones--what about a dollar ALL STAR COMICS, and a dollar DYNAMIC CLASSICS for the reprint material DC want to represent? A dollar BRAVE & BOLD, even a dollar HOUSE OF MYSTERY to give a dollar mystery comic every month? It would certainly have given more space for DC to use up the 35 completed comics that had the chop before they could be got to the printers.

The contraction in the comics industry caused by the Implosion has meant there are less jobs in comics for the creative personnel whose names we're used to seeing in the credit boxes; Larry Hama is returning to acting, Murray Boltinoff is going into at least semi-retirement (though still in charge of G.I. COMBAT), Al Milgrom went freelance and within weeks replaced Bob Hall as an editor at Marvel, Cary Burkett left DC a few weeks early, and Bob Rozakis finds himself without scripting duties, though still kept busy on Production. The art side is less easy to evaluate--time will tell.

So, Warner Publishing have come in and over-ruled Jenette Kahn, savagely cutting back DC's output in a bid to relieve the glut of titles on the stands and to put the emphasis on their mainstays, especially SUPERMAN, hopefully reinforcing sagging sales figures --let's wish them luck! -RU

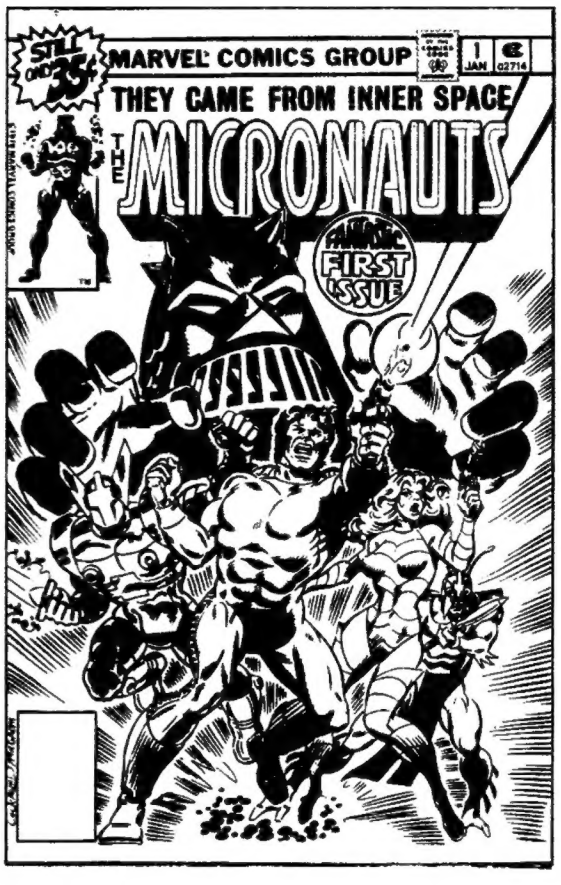
Comics News

There are a number of cancellations at Marvel, to make room for new projects. HUMAN FLY ends with ≠19 (March); MARVEL CLASSICS COMICS closes with ≠36, featuring "A Christmas Carol"; and the Hanna-Barbera titles (Dynomutt, Flintstones, The Funtastic World of Hanna-Barbera, Hanna-Barbera Spotlight, Hanna-Barbera TV stars, Scooby Doo, Laff-A-Lympics, and Yogi Bear) end with issues cover-dated December and January.

David Kraft has left Marvel, due to the new contracts which some creators feel "sign their rights away" to material and characters they create. FOOM is therefore cancelled; Bill Mantlo takes over TARZAN, and Ed Hannigan will script DEFENDERS.

Gene Colan is leaving HOWARD THE DUCK and TOMB OF DRACULA, as he wishes to draw something else instead. As Marv Wolfman won't script the book without Gene Colan, who has drawn every issue of ToD to date, TOMB OF DRACULA ends with ≠72. HTD will continue, though, scripted by Bill Mantlo, and edited by Mark Gruenwald and Jim Shooter. Bill's first two issues will conclude the Doctor Bong plot.

THE MICRONAUTS ≠1, by Bill Mantlo, Mike Golden & Joe Rubinstein, has a January cover-date, and SHOGUN WARRIORS ≠1, by Doug Moench, Herb Trimpe & Dan Green follows a month later -- these will Therefore both be out three months earlier than had previously been planned.



All Marvel's $1.50 colour magazines are going over to full process colour, which means that the original artwork is coloured naturally by brush or pen. HULK MAGAZINE ≠13 will be the first issue of that title coloured in this way; Ron Wilson remains the regular penciller. Ernie Chan inked ≠12, Bob McLeod ≠13; Archie Goodwin will not now be becoming editor, instead Rick Marschall will remain. The second Moon Knight story (in ≠12) was drawn by Keith Pollard, the third by new Marvel artist Bill Sienkiewicz.

STARLORD will appear in MARVEL PREVIEW ≠17 and ≠18, and also in a colour Super Special; issue 16 is a horror issue featuring LILITH by Gerber & Colan, backed up by HODIAH TWIST by McGregor & Colan, plus work by Shooter, Palmer & DeZuniga.

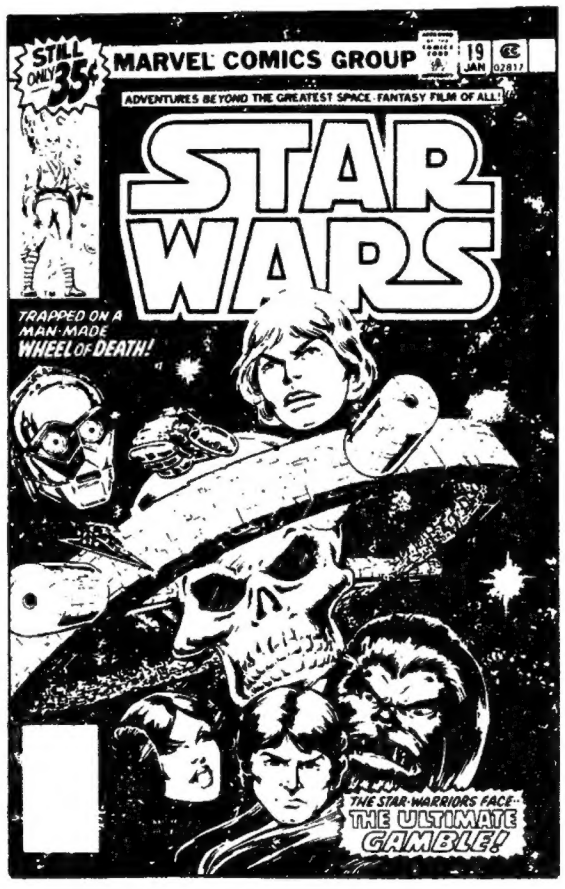
Bob Hall has resigned as a Marvel editor, and is coming to England with his play "The Passion of Dracula". His post at Marvel has been taken by Al Milgrom, recently let go by DC.

Since Marvel Preview is not going to process colour at present, the WEIRDWORLD story that Mike Ploog is drawing for a colour magazine is not yet scheduled -- nor is the regular comic he is also engaged on, written by Doug Moench, also starring the Weirdworld characters.

Doug Moench is taking over STARLORD from Chris Claremont after the Super Special issue; other Super Specials starring SPIDER-MAN and DR STRANGE (whose TV pilot was broadcast in America on 31st August): Jim Shooter is plotting the ROLLING STONES issue, which Gene Colan will draw.

The fourth Marvel newspaper strip, joining SPIDER-MAN, CONAN, and HOWARD THE DUCK, will be THE INCREDIBLE HULK, starting on October 30th. Stan Lee will write it, and Larry Lieber pencil it, while both Frank Springer and Ernie Chan have inked some of the strips.

Steve Ditko may soon be back at Marvel, though not on SPIDER-MAN; and Jack Kirby has finished his work on storyboards for the FANTASTIC FOUR cartoon series, and is now pencilling for Marvel once again...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David Michelinie takes over full control (plot and script) of THE AVENGERS shortly--John Byrne is the penciller, starting with ≠181. The new artist for THE DEFENDERS is Herb Trimpe. Mike Golden is drawing a special issue of HOWARD THE DUCK, in which Howard goes to a chicken farm.

Mike Vosburg is the new penciller, with issue 22, of JOHN CARTER, WARLORD OF MARS. Mary Jo Duffy is scripting an issue of DAREDEVIL from a Roger McKenzie plot, writing some issues of THE DEFENDERS and a fill-in STAR WARS which features the Jedi Knights, and becoming regular scripter of POWER MAN with ≠56, over Jim Shooter plots, at which time Trevor Von Eeden takes over the pencils on the book. Roger Stern has plotted HULK ≠232, which David Michelinie has scripted, and scripted CAPTAIN AMERICA ≠230. Don Perlin is Cap's new inker, from ≠229. Ralph Macchio is to take over the scripting of DR STRANGE, with Mark Gruenwald aiding him, over Roger Stern's plots--and Kerry Gammill is drawing a fill-in issue.

Since Frank Thorne left the RED SONJA 35 cent comic, according to Marvel to concentrate on the Red Sonja Super Special, John Buscema has drawn two issues, while Gil Kane is also doing one, and Ernie Chan is scheduled to take over as the regular penciller. Bob Layton is inking HULK ≠234. Who knows, in between all this activity it may even be possible for somebody to get together at least one or two, or maybe even three or four, letters pages?

The revival of SUPER-VILLAIN TEAM-UP is likely only to be a one-shot reprint of a Dr Doom/Red Skull encounter from ASTONISHING TALES; the new Sub-Mariner book is still in pre-production. The Christmas issue of MARVEL TEAM-UP, by Claremont & Byrne, stars Spider-Man and...Red Sonja?

THOR ≠280 is by Roy Thomas, from a plot by Don & Maggie Thompson, drawn by Wayne Boring & Tom Palmer. The following two issues will guest-star The Eternals. And over in INVADERS, Roy is adding The Whizzer and Miss America to the team after the Liberty Legion cross-over, for a while.

NOVA is due for a change of direction soon; Richard Ryder will become part of a re-formed "Champions", led by The Comet. In about a year there'll be a crossover with THE FANTASTIC FOUR in a story involving The Sphinx. And, talking of Marvel's longest-established foursome, the FF are to become entangled in a multi-part space saga, and Johnny Storm is returning to college, to tie in with the FF cartoon show, which does not include the Human Torch as he's under contract for a live-action TV pilot, if they can find (a) an actor who can burst into flame more than once, and (b) a way to stop young viewers from trying the stunt too. Strange, it's never been known to have that effect on comics fans!

IRON MAN ≠120 & 121 features a battle with the Sub-Mariner; HULK ≠235 & 236 will guest-star Machine Man, while Devil Dinosaur is likely to turn up in GODZILLA--where else? Deathbird will return to MS MARVEL, and HELLCAT co-stars in a fill-in MARVEL TEAM-UP scripted by Bill Kunkel which will also introduce Hedy Wolfe (the other half of PATSY AND HEDY) to the Marvel universe; Howard "Tones" Bender will be the artist. GHOST RIDER ≠35 features a cross-country race with Death, written and drawn by Jim Starlin.

The next three full-colour paperback reprints from Pocket Books (or over here Wyndham Science Fantasy) are a first CAPTAIN AMERICA volume, and second collections of HULK and DR STRANGE tales.

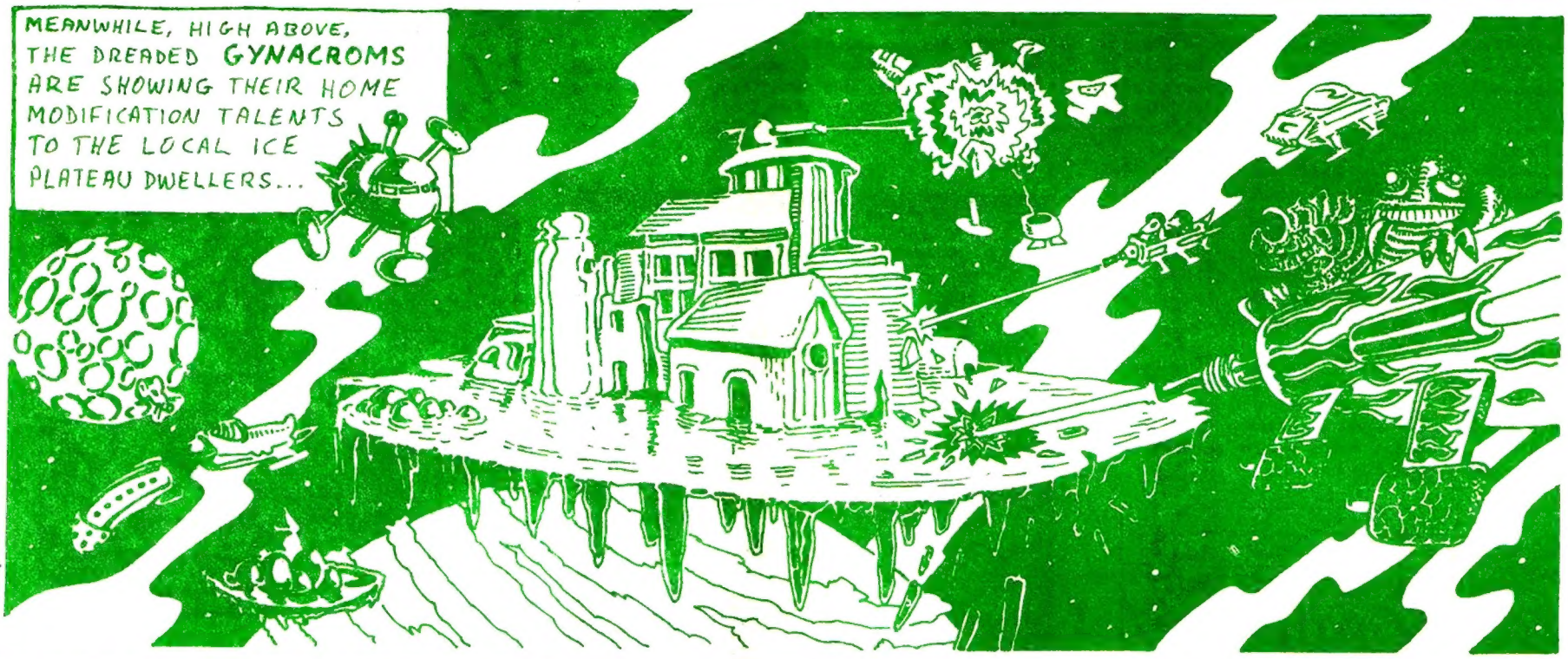
DOMINIC FORTUNE will return in a near-future issue of MARVEL PREMIERE, plotted and drawn by Howie Chaykin and dialogued by David Michelinie. Also due in that overbooked title is a 3-parter featuring BLACK WIDOW by Ralph Macchio & George Perez, and CALEB HAMMER by Peter Gillis & Gene Day, a Canadian who's now inking for Marvel.

A special Christmas issue of X-MEN is planned, by Chris 'n' John; Misty Knight and Colleen Wing are joining the book as supporting characters.

Over at Gold Key, HAPPY DAYS ≠1 has been put back to a January (-ish) cover date; the first issue of FLASH GORDON is by John David Warner & Carlos Garzon R. THE TWILIGHT ZONE is ending with the April, 1979 issue, ≠91.

...MORE NEWS ON PAGE FIVE...

THUNDERMOLE © TERRY MOORE ©

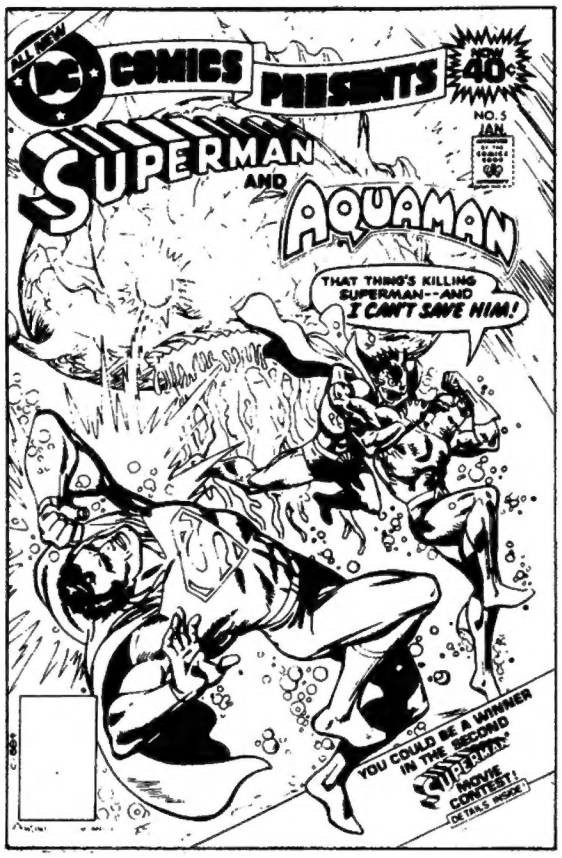

MEANWHILE, HIGH ABOVE, THE DREADED GYNACROMS ARE SHOWING THEIR HOME MODIFICATION TALENTS TO THE LOCAL ICE PLATEAU DWELLERS...

The DC Limited Collectors' Edition of SUPERMAN ≠1 has been cancelled again. To tie in with the movie there'll be a Superman Movie Magazine out in December, edited by Jack C. Harris and Ed Summer The soundtrack record's out in October.

With reference to the "Englehart Returns to Comics" heading on Bem-20 (and nobody noticed that there was nothing about this in the news section!), Steve has scripted a 25-page story intended for the late DOORWAY TO NIGHTMARE, which will appear in the Dollar UNEXPECTED. DC COMICS PRESENTS ≠8, starring Superman and Swamp Thing, is by Steve, drawn by Murphy Anderson. He is also writing a Batman-Batgirl team-up for BATMAN 311, featuring Dr Phosphorus, and WEIRD WAR TALES ≠73 will be a 22-page Englehart story, drawn by Ernesto Patricio--due to the sudden change to the smaller format, a number of books over the next few months will have from 18 to 23 pages of new story, before settling down to 17 once more.

DC's projected line of digest comics has been put back at least until December; it's not likely to start with WELCOME BACK KOTTER or THE BEST OF DC as originally planned, but with Sheldon Mayer kids material instead, as it fits in better with the other digests (Archie, Dennis the Menace) on the market these days.

Marshall Rogers is drawing a Nightwing & Flamebird story for SUPERMAN FAMILY ≠194; the first dollar DETECTIVE (starring the Batman Family), ≠481, has two Batman stories, one by O'Neil and Rogers, the other the first half of the Starlin & Russell story. Also in ≠481 are Batgirl, the Human Target, and Robin, while ≠482, besides the conclusion of the Starlin/Russell tale, has Mike Golden on a 15-page Demon story and also on a Batmite adventure; ≠483 commemorates the 40th anniversary of Batman's first appearance.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DETAILS INSIDE!

DC COMICS PRESENTS ≠6 co-stars Green Lantern, and in ≠7 Red Tornado comes into the spotlight; both these issues are written by Paul Levitz, while ≠6 is drawn by Swan & Chiaramonte, and ≠7 by Dick Dillin and an inker. ≠9 has at last the Black Lightning guest-shot, and the return of Martin Pasko as regular scripter.

The SECRET SOCIETY OF SUPER-VILLAINS saga is to be concluded in JLA, scripted by Gerry Conway; the unprinted pages of the cancelled title will not be used, as the story goes in a different direction.

WORLD'S FINEST ≠255 has José Garcia Lopez as new regular artist on the lead feature, and in the Shazam strip Bulletman and Bulletgirl guest-star. Denny O'Neil's first Supes/Bats script is in ≠256; in that issue, Dick Dillin takes over as Green Arrow penciller as Black Lightning makes a guest appearance prior to starting his own WF feature in ≠257; José Delbo pencils Black Canary.

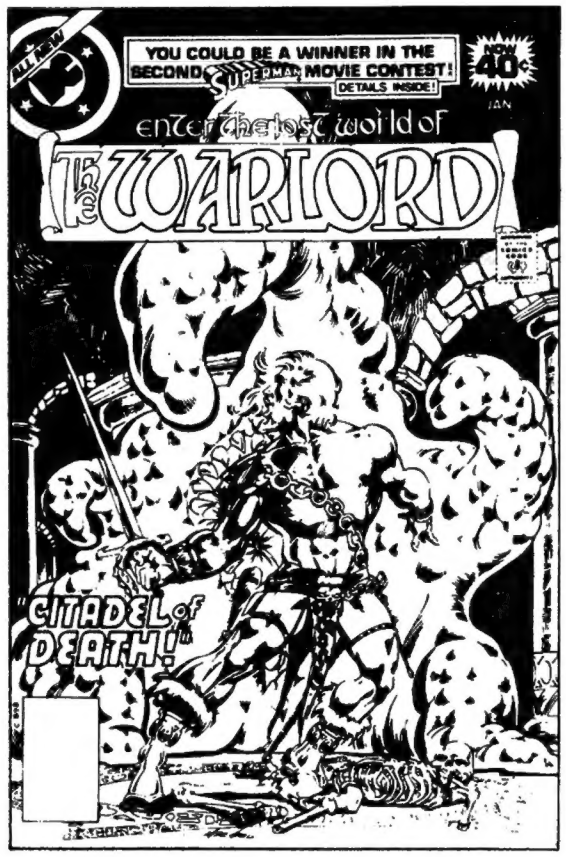
GREEN LANTERN ≠113 is a sequel to the "White Bat" story in Batman Family ≠19, by Denny O'Neil, Alex Saviuk & Frank Chiaramonte; Dave Hunt will become regular inker with ≠114, it seems.

MEN OF WAR ≠15 will lead with a 7-page Grave-Digger yarn, plus an 11-page tale of "D-Day" by Bill Kelley, Ross Andru & Ruben Yandoc. Paul Kupperberg is working on a multi-part back-up for this book set in the Franco-Prussian war and featuring a masterspy of the 1870's.

Bat Lash returns to the Scalphunter strip in WEIRD WESTERN TALES ≠52; JONAH HEX ≠21 features Jonah's villainous father, Dick Ayers -- oops! I mean Jonah's villainous father, full stop. Dick Ayers is drawing a fill-in for this title.

ADVENTURE COMICS ≠461 has the Aquaman feature done by Paul Kupperberg, Don Newton and Frank Chiaramonte; Don Heck fills in on art for the following two issues, as well as taking over the FLASH feature regularly.

Kurt Schaffenberger is doing a fill-in on art for SUPER FRIENDS ≠18. Denny O'Neil will write ≠20, and he and E. Nelson Bridwell will then do alternate issues, as Nelson can't manage to write the book on a monthly basis.



WEIRD WAR ≠72 includes stories by Simonson and Alcala, and ≠74 features a Paul Kupperberg and George Evans tale. Vince Colletta becomes regular inker of WONDER WOMAN with ≠251. Rich Buckler's FLASH art will be inked by Jack Abel, it seems. José Garcia Lopez did the cover for DETECTIVE ≠483, Alex Saviuk & Dick Giordano did the cover for GREEN LANTERN ≠114, and Joe Staton joined Dick Giordano to decorate the outside of SUPERBOY AND THE LEGION OF SUPER-HEROES ≠248 and ≠249. Romeo Tanghal is inking UNKNOWN SOLDIER ≠224.

BRAVE & BOLD co-stars Phantom Stranger in ≠145, by Haney and Aparo; to help them adjust to the monthly schedule, ≠146's World War II pairing of the late Batman of Earth-II and Unknown Soldier is by Haney, Romeo Tanghal & Frank McLaughlin, while ≠147's visit by Supergirl is written by Cary Burkett, and drawn by Jim Aparo, and ≠148 looks as if it'll be Batman and Plastic Man in a Christmas adventure by Haney, Joe Staton, and Jim Aparo. Furthermore, Bob Haney is giving up the Superman/Batman tales in WORLD'S FINEST, and Jim Aparo has given the Deadman series now in ADVENTURE COMICS over to the capable hands of José Luis Garcia Lopez.

Since the LSH first appeared in ADVENTURE ≠247, and SUPERBOY AND THE LEGION ≠247 has the 247th tale of the LSH, it's a special occasion, right? The 247th tale is by Paul Levitz, Joe Staton and Dave Hunt, and a second story has the end of the Fatal Five by Len Wein, Staton and Jack Abel. ≠249 and ≠250 contain the Levitz/Starlin story done originally for the Legion Spectacular.

BATMAN ≠310, the first by the new team of Len Wein, Irv Novick & Dick Giordano, features the return of The Gentleman Ghost, Hawkman's old foe. WONDER WOMAN ≠252 introduces a new villainess called The Empress Of The Silver Snake. General Zod appears in ACTION ≠492, but doesn't look like Terrance Stamp, who plays him in the film.

The new art team for Superboy in the SUPERMAN FAMILY dollar book is Alex Saviuk & Joe Giella, while Lois Lane surrenders to the blandishments of Bob Oksner & Vince Colletta, and Jimmy Olsen, John Calnan & Joe Giella are just good friends.

Mike Fleisher's SUPERMAN ENCYCLOPAEDIA (volume three, after Batman and Wonder Woman, in his series) is out this month, as is a 1979 calendar of the Man of Steel.

The LOSERS strip from OUR FIGHTING FORCES will continue in G.I. COMBAT, still by Bob Kanigher & George Evans. The CREEPER 25-pager that had been scheduled for SHOWCASE should appear in WORLD'S FINEST next year. However, chuckles has lost his regular WF slot to Hawkman. UNEXPECTED will now in its dollar comic incarnation feature material done for WITCHING HOUR, DOORWAY TO NIGHTMARE, and HOUSE OF SECRETS, complete with their hosts. The editorial assignments now have Julius Schwartz as editor of the Superman titles (which include Super Friends, but not JLA), Paul Levitz on the Batman books (plus House of Mystery, Men Of War, Unknown Soldier, & Weird War), Ross Andru on Adventure, Flash, Jonah Hex, JLA, Weird Western, and Wonder Woman, Jack C. Harris on Ghosts, GL, Superboy/LSH, Unexpected, Warlord, and World's Finest, Murray Boltinoff on G.I. Combat, Joe Kubert on Sgt Rock, and Joe Orlando on the newspaper "World's Greatest Super-Heroes" strip and any tabloids and special formats DC do.

So, after the major shake-up last time, the scene seems to be reassuringly normal. The most major change is the departure of Mike Gold, in a move unconnected with the DC Implosion--see page 15 too. Mike has been very helpful to Bem since he joined DC, and we wish him good fortune in his new projects, which do include some comics-related work as well as work in the field of social service. Jack C. Harris will try to fit Mike's work in on top of his editorial duties.

Over at Archie Comics, 1960's superhero tales are being reprinted in their digest line; ARCHIE COMICS DIGEST ≠32 and LITTLE ARCHIE DIGEST ≠3 feature Simon & Kirby FLY stories, while ARCHIE ANDREWS, WHERE ARE YOU? DIGEST ≠8 features his origin. ARCHIE SUPER-HERO DIGEST will be all super-hero material, including Fly, the Jaguar, the Mighty Crusaders, perhaps Double Life of Pvt Strong, and Archie as Captain Hero and Jughead as Pureheart the Powerful. Whether this becomes a regular book or not depends on sales. -ML

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KATHOLICITY

Quote from World's Finest #150--Green Arrow to Black Canary: "I love you, kid...and I always have."

Always? Even while she was still married to Larry Lance?

Quote from World's Finest #151--Black Canary narrating: "Oliver Queen is one of the reasons I came to Earth-1."

Was he? Fascinating. She told everyone at the time it was to escape the memory of her just-deceased husband. Didn't she? On looking up the appropriate issue of JLA, one finds another interesting quote. "Not a nice way to treat a lady", observes Green Arrow, aiming a shaft full of goo at the Canary, "But I've seen that particular lady tie professional wrestlers into knots". Just when he was privileged to view this is shrouded in mystery. They were never on the same fighting team in any of the previous JLA/JSA crossovers. An unrecorded meeting?

Let us give the pair resident on Earth-1 the benefit of the doubt. On Earth XXX, however, a world with such a large population of superheroes that it has a Justice Brigade, there is an interesting divorce trial taking place before Judge Thick. The court has been closed to reporters because of the spare-time work of several of the people involved, but it is well-known that a determined snoop from Earth-Prime can get in anywhere.

Clerk of the Court: All rise. His honour Judge Thick.

Judge: Hrm, yes. What's next? Ah, yes, Lance versus Lance and Queen. They drew lots for this one, and I lost. Are all parties present?

Clerk: The Lances are, your honour. Mr Queen, it says here, was inadvertantly dropped into a time-warp by a friend over 8 months ago. They've been trying to get him back, but with no luck so far.

Judge: I have never heard such an improbable reason for not being in court. What was he doing near a time-warp, anyway?

Clerk: It says he was pursuing his hobby of archery at the time, when his friend, who was pursuing his hobby, described here as "ring-slinging", got hit on the head by a yellow rock and let him fall.

Judge: Let's leave that. My head's starting to ache already. Now, you three lawyers are...?

L-1: Representing Mr Lance.

L-2: Representing Mrs Lance.

L-3: Representing the Trustees of Mr Queen's estate, which is in a hell of a mess since the legal provisions for people lost in time-warps are vague in the extreme. My instructions are to deny that he was necessarily involved in this at all.

L-1: Ha!

L-3: Ha! to you, too!

L-1: Your honour, my client and his wife were married 5 years ago. They were quite happy, until--

L-2: Objection! His client may have been happy. Mine was bored stiff after six months.

Judge: Sustained.

L-1: Oh all right, he was happy, until two years ago, when Mrs Lance joined a freelance -- no pun intended, your honour -- group of law enforcers calling themselves the Justice Brigade. There she was able to give free rein to her interest in unarmed combat. Unfortunately, there she found another interest to give free rein to. Mr Lance suspected nothing for a long time--

Judge: I thought he was a detective.

L-1: He's not a very good one, sir. He suspected nothing, even when his wife took to staying out at nights, and refusing him his marital rights because she was too tired. He believed her when she said she'd been doing extra crimefighting. When she started talking in her sleep, and made frequent mention of the name of Oliver, he believed her when she said the Lionel Bart musical had made a great impression on her mind.

Judge: You're right, he's not a good detective, is he?

L-1: But when she gave birth to a blond green-eyed child, on a date some 11 months after they had last had relations to the best of his memory, he stopped believing her.

Judge: And people call me Thick!

L-1: When the Infant Future Aptitude Prognosticator, invented by the famed eccentric scientist Prof. Potter, was applied to the child and he was found to be a born archer, my client knew where to seek the other guilty party. Namely, down a time-warp. We tried to summon the other 'Brigadiers' to this court, since they must have known about this association, but they are all out scouring the time-warp. We got one, however, in Gotham City. Call Batman!

Clerk: Yoo-hoo, Batman!

Judge: Don't be facetious. You sir, why are you dressed like that?

Batman: To strike terror into the hearts of the underworld, sir.

Judge: Oh. Anyone got an aspirin?

L-1: Batman, what do you know about the association between my client's wife and Oliver Queen?

Batman: Nothing.

L-1: Nothing! You noticed nothing unusual about their behaviour?

Batman: Only a tendency to fall asleep at meetings, which I put down to too many night patrols.

L-1: You are supposed to be the world's best detective...?

Batman: So I am. Doesn't mean I go about prying into my friends' private affairs all the time.

L-1: Ha! Affairs! Was Mrs Lance not distraught at the time of the time-warp incident?

Batman: We were all distressed. It was an awful thing to happen. Besides, when he went he was carrying the only key to the Brigade HQ's men's room. You've no idea how long it can take even me to pick a lock in some circumstances.

L-1: But Mrs Lance was the worst upset, was she not?

Batman: I assumed that the early stages of pregnancy were making her nervous.

Judge: How pregnant was she then?

Batman: Two weeks, your honour.

Judge: Then how did you know?

Batman: Elementary, my dear judge. If you're the world's greatest detective, that is!

L-2: Your honour, my client is not now attempting to deny her guilt. It's the third party that's saying it wasn't their man. My client only wishes to state that there were extenuating circumstances. First, it must be obvious to all that Mr Lance is not the most exhilirating of men. Nevertheless, both she and Mr Queen did attempt to fight their mutual attraction at first. But when they were captured by the famed mad scientist Dr Light, who held them hostage and kept them locked in the same cell for two weeks, their resolution cracked. Simultaneously, half-way through the fourth day, to be precise.

Judge: These mad scientists have no consideration. What about the pregnancy, Mr Williams?

L-2: An accident, your honour. As soon as this hearing is over we proceed to Courtroom 4 to sue the Acme Pill Company. An associate of my client, the Flash--

Judge: Is that the New York Flash, presently on trial for indecent behaviour in Courtroom 5?

L-2: Certainly not. This one is a respectable married man who never behaves indecently, in Courtroom 5 or elsewhere. He analysed the pills in question and found them defective.

L-3: Your honour, much of the case against my client rests on the parentage of this child. Our contention is that fair colouring and an inborn talent for archery do not conclusively point to only one possible father. If you will permit us to use this machine provided by the famed slightly dotty scientist, Prof. Pepperwinkle, we will prove this.

Judge: Why is this case beset by mentally unstable scientists, however famed? Oh, all right, go ahead. Excuse me while I take another aspirin!

L-3: With this Interdimensional Caucasian Toxophilic Probe, we shall soon -- ah!

Judge: Arrrgggh! That nearly...hit me! Whoever he is, arrest him for contempt of court!

Hawkeye: Look, if you haul me away from a fight you'll just have to put up with flying arrows. Who the heck are you, anyway? Where is this? Why am I here? If it's Kang again, I swear I--

L-3: Please be calm, sir. If you'll just help us with this case, we will put you back where you came from straight afterwards. Could you take off your mask, please? Your honour, please note the colouring. Now, sir, are you your world's greatest archer?

Hawkeye: Sure.

Judge: That's a matter of opinion. He nearly hit me.

Hawkeye: I was actually aiming at Godzilla originally. You want me to just stand about while New York was eaten? Anyway, watch!

Judge: Arrrgggh!!!

Hawkeye: There! Split the first shaft in two. Convinced?

Judge: Nearly hit me again. Oh, my head! Mother always wanted me to become a doctor...

L-3: You see, your honour, this man might have been the father!

Hawkeye: Not with my luck with women --though I'm sure it would have been a pleasure, ma'am!

L-2: But my client has never met him, before today!

L-3: He could have a counterpart on this world.

Hawkeye: Can I go home now? I would rather fight Godzilla than stay in this madhouse any longer!

Judge: So would I, but I haven't got any choice.

L-3: The machine seems to have gone a bit funny--No! Put me down!

Dr Fate: Allow me. Begone to your own world, archer!

Judge: Now what? Wasn't he once taken in for illegal fortune-telling?

Dr Fate: My name is Fate, mortal. I thought it best to re-open the time-warp here. Right Superman, bring him back!

Judge: Why me, Lord? Oh my head.

Green Arrow: Why've you brought me to a courtroom, Supes? I would rather--oh, hi honey. Don't tell me dimwit's finally caught on.

Judge: Mr Queen, I presume. I won't even ask why he's dressed like that.

GA: I wish I'd been dressed differently. I landed in Nottingham in the reign of Richard I, and spent two weeks dodging soldiers who mistook me for someone else. And Sherwood Forest was worse yet; when Supes finally found me I was having a hell of a job beating off the Gay Men!

Judge: You mean Merry Men, surely.

GA: You didn't meet them.

Judge: Enough! I have had enough. Nobody could be expected to live with anyone with such lunatic friends. Divorce granted. Go away, all of you, before I go completely, irreversibly mad!

GA: Excitable, isn't he? It's good to be back after such a rough few weeks. Incidentally, Dinah, whose is the kid?

Judge (ten seconds later): I will not have people fainting all over my court! -KATHLEEN GLANCY

THE BEM BALLOT RESULTS

75 Bem subscribers took the time and trouble to fill in the "Bem Ballot" forms sent out with Bem-19; it was a questionnaire cunningly designed to let us know what people think about Bem and its contributors, and also a little bit about fans themselves. So, let's wander through the results, shall we?

1) WHAT IS YOUR FAVOURITE PART OF BEM?

1. REACTION	31.0%	5. Made In Britain	5.7%
2. News	21.8%	6. Strips	2.3%
3. Fan-Things	20.7%	Tale-Enders	2.3%
4. Reviews	9.2%		

2) WHAT IS YOUR LEAST FAVOURITE PART?

1. KATHOLICITY	23.2%	5. Captain Frog	8.9%
2. Made In America	12.5%	6. Made In Britain	5.3%
3. Comic Comic Col	10.7%	News	5.3%
Reviews	10.7%		

3) SHOULD BEM HAVE MORE COMICS NEWS?

MORE: 46.7% LESS: 37.3% SAME: 16.0%

4) SHOULD BEM PRINT MORE COVER REPROS?

MORE: 44.6% LESS: 43.2% SAME: 12.2%

5) WHICH BEM COLUMNS SHOULD BE LONGER?

1. FAN-THINGS	26.9%	6. Katholicity	6.5%
2. News	13.9%	7. Made In America	5.6%
3. Reviews	13.0%	8. Sigh	4.6%
Reaction	13.0%	9. Tale-Enders	3.7%
5. Made In Britain	10.2%		

6) WHICH BEM COLUMNS SHOULD BE SHORTER?

1. KATHOLICITY	25.5%	4. Made In America	10.6%
2. Made In Britain	19.1%	5. News	8.5%
3. Reviews	12.8%	6. Fan-Things	6.4%

7) FAVOURITE BEM WRITER

1. MARTIN LOCK	25.3%	7. Ruan Lanihorne	5.3%
2. Kathleen Glancy	15.3%	8. Maureen James	2.5%
3. Ed Sallis	13.1%	9. Rich Morrissey	2.0%
4. Howard Siegel	10.9%	10. Sue Cruden	1.5%
5. Mike Cruden	8.6%	Nige Edwards	1.5%
6. K. Williams	8.2%	12. Chris Ash	1.3%

8) FAVOURITE BEM ARTISTS

1. MIKE MATTHEWS	13.1%	9. Alan Hunter	3.9%
2. Terry Moore	11.5%	10. Luke Rainford	3.7%
3. Superswipe	9.8%	Pete Scott	3.7%
4. Phil Elliott	7.8%	12. Jimmy Marshall	3.4%
Chris Ash	7.8%	13. Russ Nicholson	2.6%
6. Dave Byrom	7.2%	H. McAvinchey	2.6%
7. Nick Neocleous	6.0%	15. Dave Hornsby	2.3%
8. Bob Watkins	4.9%	16. Martin Dutton	2.0%

9) SHOULD BEM PRINT MORE FAN ART, OR LESS?

MORE: 61.7% LESS: 12.3% SAME: 26.0%

10) SHOULD BEM PRINT MORE LETTERS, OR LESS?

MORE: 48.6% LESS: 14.9% SAME: 36.5%

11) SHOULD BEM PRINT MORE REVIEWS, OR LESS?

MORE: 52.0% LESS: 18.7% SAME: 29.3%

12) SHOULD BEM PRINT MORE STRIPS, OR LESS?

MORE: 48.0% LESS: 20.0% SAME: 32.0%

13) WHICH IS YOUR FAVOURITE BEM STRIP?

1. THUNDERMOLE	51.5%	3. Stangroom	12.1%
2. Captain Frog	34.8%	4. Captain Nuts	1.5%

14) SHOULD EVERY COLUMN BE IN EVERY ISSUE?

YES: 36.1% NO: 63.9%

Some interesting results, but sometimes it's not easy to generalise from them. "Katholicity" doesn't seem very popular with one part of the readership--and yet its writer, Kathleen Glancy, has enough ardent fans to come in second in the "favourite Bem writer" category. The fact that he's been in every issue of Bem since ≠2 has put Superswipe rather higher up the "favourite Bem artist" list than I would have expected--and, as the results are linked to Bem appearances, such recent additions to our roster as Russ Nicholson and Alan Hunter are lower in the listings than they would be in a more general popularity poll. To come twelfth, or sixteenth, in such a listing is no dishonour, of course; the lists could have gone to 20, or 27, places, respectively!

A number of categories don't need to be fully tabulated; 94½% of the people who answered category 15, "Do You Read Fantasy Trader?", admitted that they did, and 75.7% went so far as to say they found it useful. The "What Do You Like Most About Bem & FT" question attracted a wide variety of comments; among the most often repeated were the regularity, the quality of the production, and the value for money. To keep me from getting too big-headed, though, the things liked least included the regularity (more you want?), the size, and the occasional piece of "tatty" art. The general suggestions for Bem included making it bigger (would you settle for making the type smaller?), publishing it more often (but I do need a few hours sleep now 'n' then), and adding more colour.

But the next category deserves to be set out in full; some people grumbled about me excluding Bem itself, as if this meant I was blandly assuming that Bem is everyone's favourite--the fact is that, being connected with Bem, the vote would have been biased, and leaving Bem out left the way clear for unbiased voting.

20) FAVOURITE FANZINE (OTHER THAN BEM)

1. COMIC MEDIA NEWS	29.0%	TCJ	1.7%
2. Panelologist	26.1%	7. Crom	1.5%
3. Comics Unlimited	16.1%	8. Media	1.3%
4. Fantasy Advertiser	15.0%	9. Elipse	1.0%
5. Fantasy Trader	1.7%	Comix Plus	1.0%

TCJ is The Comics Journal, the only American fanzine to crash the "top ten", although The Heroine Showcase, The Adventuress and Collectors Dream also received votes. It's interesting how after the other members of the (with Bem) "Big Five", voting falls away very sharply; obviously the editors of Media, Elipse, Worlds, Fantasy Trader, and other less regular and well-known zines, have a lot of work to do before they can make it a "big six" or "big seven"

"Do you buy comics by post?" was the next of the 30 questions--and, with varying enthusiasm, 74.0% said they did, which compares with 63.5% who go to comic marts and conventions. The next hurdle was "How Many BRITISH Comics Do You Read In A Week?" With great aplomb, you confessed to reading 2.3857142 -- on average, that is. "Two" was the most common number, followed by "Zero", then "One", "Four", "Five", "Six", "Three", and "Seven". Only one person reads more, 15 to be exact -- and it isn't Ruan Lanihorne! "How Many AMERICAN Comics Do You Read In A Week?" Seemed a logical follow-up; 6.4, it seems. What, less than one a day? I reckon I read 15 new comics in a week, plus maybe on average 10 or so back issues, except when producing an issue of Bem reaches a critical stage! Actually, the most common answer here was "three", which 8 people put, and then, with 6 votes each, "one", "four", "five", "six", and "ten". 4 people don't read any--8 read more than ten. If there are any statisticians out there, I'll gladly send you the full figures--just remember the friendly 7p stamp, okay?

The next question asked "What's The Most You've Ever Paid For A Comic" -- an average here would hardly be useful, as the answers varied from 35p to £180, but around £1.50 was the most common amount. Only a quarter of fans have paid over a fiver for a comic--whether it was invested in a Neal Adams GREEN LANTERN or a Siegel & Shuster SUPERMAN, a GIANT-SIZE X-MEN or a FANTASTIC FOUR ≠1, I don't know!

"About How Many Comics Have You Got?" Again, there was quite a variation, from 300 to 15,000 --quite a healthy figure that, it means somebody has got a very nearly complete Marvel collection from FF ≠1, plus almost every DC from 1960 on, and probably Charltons, Warrens, Gold Keys, and comics from companies no longer with us. Ten of the ballot-fillers didn't give an answer -- the other 65 can muster about 141,058 comics, which gives an average of 2170 per fan.

"Who's Your Favourite Science Fiction Author?" Britain's Michael Moorcock (11.4%) beat Isaac Asimov (10.2%), with Harlan Ellison (9.1%) in third place, ahead of Robert A. Heinlein (5.7%), Philip José Farmer and Philip K. Dick (4.5%), and then Harry Harrison, J.G. Ballard, Larry Niven and Ray Bradbury, all on 3.4%. All of which goes to show that a lot of comics fans are also s.f. readers. And 89.2% of 'em buy records, too!

The "Favourite TV Series" category gave 52 different shows, from Bionic Woman to Coronation Street, and Rock Follies to Tomorrow's World; only 7 shows got more than two votes, though, and, with 9.5% of the vote, "The Prisoner" came first, with "Star Trek" on 7.4%, "Dr Who" on 6.3%, "The Incredible Hulk" and "M.A.S.H." on 5.3%, and "Logan's Run" and "Happy Days" on 3.2%. Shows getting two votes were "Rafferty", "Monty Python", "Avengers", "1990", "Blake's Seven", "Space: 1999", "Fawlty Towers", "The Water Margin", "The Rockford Files", "Whodunnit", "Ripping Yarns", and "The Sweeney", all shows that I'll cheerfully watch; we're fond of science fiction and fantasy series, it seems. One respondent gave his vote to "The Test Card"...

Since fan artists were well represented, the "Other Hobbies" category was won by "drawing & painting" (14.5%), followed by "records" (12.3%), "SF" (5.8%), and films, books and fanac all on 5.1%. I'm afraid I must announce that only two of us listed "girls" in this section; among the other activities mentioned were jigsaws, eating, kitten strangling, drugs, golf, suicide, tennis, drinking, astrology, various perversions, stamps, bee-keeping, hoping comics'll go down in price, sleeping, and hillwalking. It just goes to show that we're "about average", I'd say... (?)

And that only leaves the age question; we're all 18 years and three months old, on average--I'll certainly settle for that! 16 is the most common age, but there are a number of people in the 25 to 29 age-group, as well; the youngest person to fill in the ballot form was 13, and the oldest (not K. Williams) 47.

So, that's about it; it will be interesting to hold another ballot next year. If you never saw a form this time, one way to make sure you get one is to subscribe to Bem, as it isn't possible to put ballot forms in all shop copies. I'd like to thank everyone who did send the form in; your views on Bem will certainly help us all to make it the fanzine you want it to be.

In the answers to the earlier questions, there seems to be a tendency to ask for more of almost everything; news, cover repros, fan art, letters, reviews, and strips! With the extra space we've got now, and the extra print reduction, most of this will be possible -- at least we've got your permission to leave a column out now and then! If you keep reading Bem, you'll see how the suggestions made are adopted; I'm glad that so many people were interested enough to make their suggestions.

-Martin Lock

fan-things
BY ED SALLIS

Plenty of zines to talk about this time -- but first, a public service announcement:

"On Wednesday the 6th September 1978 Phil Hall was declared a class enemy by the Arachnius Productions gang of four, and shortly afterwards was eliminated as editor of MEDIA.

"Arachnius Productions declare all decadent acts perpetrated by the old regime null and void. Therefore MEDIA shall remain at its normal size and at its normal ad rates."

This communiqué was signed and finger-printed by Graeme Bassett, which explains a lot; MEDIA's subscription rate is £1 for 5 issues, and looking at ≠11, Phil's last issue as editor and publisher, it's worth it. The thought of it being in GB's control is...er...highly interesting!

VERTIGO ≠2 has quickly followed ≠1 (reviewed last time), which is a good sign; it has 20 A5 for 14p from Geoff Lindsey.

Taking my comments on Veg-1's cover to heart, this issue sports a Neal Adams cover of the Batman (a sketch done at a Con, I imagine), as well as sensible reviews and comicdom comments, a lettercol, and a wildly weird Raymond Chandler pastiche casting a certain Thunder God as the private eye. Barry Winetrobe and Geoff are producing a good fanzine here -- boy, do we need them now!

What, I wondered, was a "Palstine Hint"? It had 10 chemically copied A5 pages and rather faint typing, and yet had many well-known fans among its contributors. Closer examination revealed the title to be PRISTINE MINT ≠3; ≠4, properly printed, is due in November for a 10p coin and a 7p stamp from Ian Abrahams

--it's not competition for CMN or Bem, but it's a zine you could easily get involved with, if you give it a try.

Next in the pile comes PATIENT FORTRESS, a Dr Who poetry zine; high quality production means you only get 4 A4 pages for 20p from John Huscroft,

but it makes a change from some zines that come along.

CLOSER TO THE EDGE ≠2 4 A4 mimeo pages for 14p from Steven J. Green,

looks as if it could be a useful regular fannish newsletter; Steve's editorial on an over-structured fandom applies mostly to SF fandom rather than comics fandom, fortunately; one thing that helps, I think, is that most "big name" comics fans are dealers, or at least fan-eds, so they've got to be available to everyone. Steve tells me that ASTRON ≠3 is due by Christmas, at about 35p by post; the bill of fare includes a talk by Bob Shaw, an interview with Joe Haldeman, a view of next year's worldcon (to be held at Heathrow) by John Brunner, "The Transatlantic Horrors", comparing UK and US TV series, an interview with Judy-Lynn del Rey, and a big lettercol. Mainly SF this time -- but I'm sure it'll be interesting.

NOUMENON is also an SF zine; it's a little bit hard to get hold of, unless you've got a zine of your own to trade for it, as it comes from Brian Thurogood,

costing $11.75 (by air) or $5.50 (by sea) for ten issues; issue 24 has 28 7¼" x 10" pages, including an interview with Brian Aldiss and lots of interesting stuff, including the plug for Bem one's starting to expect almost everywhere! Noumenon has a companion zine, STRIPS, "New Zealand's only comic magazine", which offers six issues for $5 (by sea) or $10 (by air), from Rollo Treadway.

If ≠8 is typical, the approach is more professional than fannish, with a tiny lettercol sharing a page with a few snippets of news, 19 pages of strips, an interview with Jean "Moebius" Giraud, concentrating mainly on Lieutenant Blueberry, and "Comic Collector's Comments" by Howard Siegel, including a slightly different version of his column from Bem-17. All interesting stuff.

The COMICON '78 booklet is an interesting 68-page A5 booklet, available for 60p from Colin Campbell, Rob Barrow or Otto Von Ripoff; using a strangely-coloured old Frank Bellamy sketch of a gunfighter on the cover wouldn't have been my way to start, but there are plenty of pages of art inside, a Mike Kaluta interview, and Richard Burton on Don McGregor. Interesting to see DC's ad for all its now-cancelled projects!

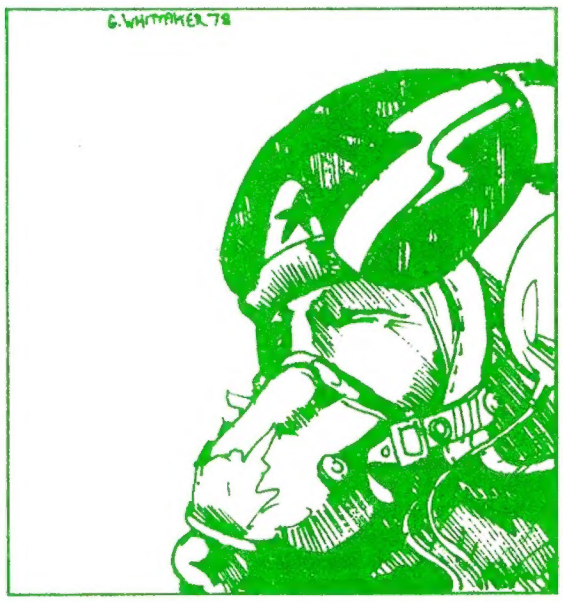
Have you ever felt some of your comics are worth more than the treatment you give them? You know, the prized possessions in your collection. But how do you start? Put them in plastic bags, shove them in boxes, mount them on shelves, or what? These methods are all very well, but they do little to display and protect your best comics, the odd, valuable and rare pieces you've managed to find after who knows how long.

One of the best solutions is binders -- they are perfect for keeping at least 24 comics together, in protective, see-through pockets and then bound together with a strong spine. Just imagine your bookshelf lined with them!

Your fantasy is nearer to home than you may think. If you are at all interested, would you please contact me as soon as possible. If enough people reply (and there doesn't need to be that many), it may be possible to order enough to get them at a reasonable price. A binder with 24 pockets (each pocket holding 2 comics), will cost no more than £5, and probably a lot less if there's enough response. Carriage would be extra. Watch this space next time for any positive results, and write as soon as you can stating the number of the binders you would eventually be interested in buying.

-GEZ KELLY

- advertisement -



MAGUS ≠2 12 A5 pages for 25p from Phil Greenaway,

comes into the category of "never mind the piano player, shoot the printer"--the print runs right off the edges of the pages, and there are big smudgy paste-up lines all over the place. All in all, this issue looks distinctly tatty and insubstantial, and I hope Phil returns to the A4 format next time, but using reduced type. The actual material is all right, though...

NEXUS is a proposed stripzine sister magazine to MAGUS; it will cost 30p by post for 20 to 24 pages, from Phil's partner-in-crime, none other than Rick Catilli.

They would appreciate a few advance orders--are there any patrons of the arts out there?

Except for MEDIA and of course FANTASY TRADER, the adzine scene is very bleak these days; SFGA has ended with ≠16, and FANTASY ADVERTISER is now merely a poorly produced three or four sheets of Frank Dobson's sales list. The Society of Comics Enthusiasts were intending to issue an adzine--but ambitious plans of a 1000 circulation have now been modified, to make it a supplement to one of their existing zines, specialising in small ads from members.

Talking of the T.S.O.C.E., to join which just send £1 to Nigel Balloch,

and what took you so long, THE COMIC REVIEW ≠4 is out, with 16 A5 pages at 20p (from Nigel) to non-members; more recently the fourth T.S.O.C.E. NEWSLETTER arrived, sent out by Colin Campbell with the new CMN Update. The "cheap comics" scheme is now revealed as a 10% discount on orders of over £4 from Colin Campbell's lists -- so any of Colin's customers who aren't in the Society had better join! Maureen James' first issue of THE COMIC REVIEW is due in a month or so, with an Emlockian editorial and an all-star cast; other goodies on the way are an apa, a fanzine sampler (very useful for new would-be fan-eds), The Society Awards -- after a slow start, T.S.O.C.E. is really moving now!

And also on the apa scene, the apa that Ian Abrahams is trying to start (see Bem-20's letter column) hasn't got off the ground yet; the page size is now A4, the frequency quarterly, and if you're interested, send Ian an s.a.e.--as Ian's the editor of PRISTINE MINT, I've already given his address earlier on this page.

APOCALYPSE ≠4 20 A4 pages for 25p from Dave Hornsby,

is a fine finale to Dave's 4-issue story. A 4-colour cover, a 4-colour centre-spread, and very accomplished art...it's a shame this is the final issue, at least for a while.

I'm afraid I've sadly neglected the X-Men Fan Club, run by G.F. Willmetts,

if you think you'd like to join, send him an s.a.e., as CEREBRO ≠1, the clubzine, doesn't mention what the joining fee is. The zine itself (20 A4 pages for 35p from G.F.) appears rather rushed, and I can't say I care for this over-specialization particularly; it is a first issue, though, so allowances must be made. Let's hope I can give the second issue a better review next time!

Eddie Walsh of Leisurebooks (see ad) is going to convert his sales list into a fanzine -- so watch out for FANDOM ≠5 shortly.

Ordinarily, I'd have run out of space by now; but with two full pages of micro-type to play with, it looks as if I can keep going for ages yet. Why, I've seen a lot of fanzines with less reading than the new enlarged Fan-Things!

Before we get back to the in tray, I suppose I ought to talk about conventions past. I gather the London Comicon is discussed in Reaction; but there's not a word about Brum's Comicon II...

Well, I can report that the festivities began with the arrival of some dealers, who had already been informed there wasn't a dealers room until Sunday, to find there was a room for them after all -- the only trouble was, they hadn't brought their stock! With smallpox scares and the like, attendance was low when two or three dealers set up their tables, and Rob Barrow began the first film -- an episode of Coronation Street? While attendance was never great, a slide-show on U.K. underground comics by Chris Welch & Hunt Emerson was a high-spot of the con, followed by the films "Fritz the Cat" and "Rocky Horror Picture Show", the auction, and a quiz hosted by our eponymous editor. Rob referred to the weekend, thanks to the hotel's bungling, the failure to appear of guest of honour Dave Cockrum, and the smallpox scare, as the "Selwyn Froggitt Con"--he left his bike outside, and in times of high emotion was heard to murmur "Magic..." So it didn't go quite right--never mind. There weren't films throughout the night--never mind. But when all is said and done, do not shoot Rob with a gun--'cause we had a lot of fun, so never mind...

ELIPSE ≠3 32 A4 pages for 35p from editors Ian Wieczorek & Phil Elliott,

deserves its usual glowing review; it contains fine strips by David Hine (5 pages), the editors (Ian's story, Phil's art, 7 pages), Steve Gibson (2 pages) and Mike Matthews (11 pages), plus a David Jackson cover, three well-illustrated pages of letters, and a few other bits. I enjoyed the whole magazine, and recommend it wholeheartedly.

It's a small step from such a fanzine to a new prozine like NEAR MYTHS 55p for 44 A4 pages from Rob King,

in theory Ruan should deal with this one, but he didn't have the space! Graham Manley is the main artist, with a wraparound colour cover and two strips, both well drawn -- other artists include John Eunson, Chris Haddon and Bonk, but the main reason for investing your money here is the first 7-page chapter of "The Adventures of Luther Arkwright" by Bryan Talbot, an artist (and writer) who's come a long way since his work started to appear in Comics Unlimited a few years ago. This zine has national distribution, so watch out for a copy in your local newsagent.

Staying away from genuine comics fanzines for a little longer, VIBES ≠6/7 22p from Paul Cox, 32 A4 pages)

is a punk rock (etc) fanzine with an occasional comics reference, including a plug for Bem! I gather the shop of the same name and address has some comics for sale among the records, which could well make it a place worth visiting if you live in the area.

And on the subject of shops, how 'bout that price war between "Dark They Were & Golden Eyed" and "Forbidden Planet"? Now that's what I call healthy competition! Bram Stokes invented the specialist SF/comics shop, near enough, and now he's made a price breakthrough--books and comics at 60 pence to the dollar! It's very handy to have both shops within five minutes walk of each other--stock does vary between the two shops, so make sure you visit both before parting with the last of your hard-earned pennies. And there are other shops outside the centre of London worth a visit, of course--Weird Fantasy in New Cross, Readmore Books, and Eddie Walsh's duo, Arcade Bookshop in Wimbledon and Leisurebooks in West Hampstead. Very useful, especially if you live near one! Birmingham, as I've mentioned before, has a pair of interesting shops to visit, though these days Nostalgia & Comics specialises in old & new comics (not to mention nostalgia), and Andromeda are big in SF and Star Trek, so they don't compete directly. Andromeda celebrated an expansion that's doubled the size of their shop on 23rd September, with glasses of wine, and the well-known SF writer and one-time comics artist (a friend and collaborator to Wally Wood in the early 1950's) Harry Harrison on hand to sign his books or, when our reporter was there, anybody else's. "Great if you like comic-books" was his verdict on Robert E. Howard's Conan stories...

Well, SUPER ADVENTURE STORIES has appeared as promised, either four months early ("coming in December") or eight months late--32 A4 pages for 50p by post from Jonny Kurzman,

featuring "Red Dragon" by Jonny himself, "Sons of the Phoenix" by Michael-Jan Gibas, "Titan" by Stephen O'Leary, and "Bounty Hunter", which was started by Tony Langan, and completed by Jonny, assisted by Steven O'Leary, who may well be the twin brother of the "Titan" artist with a rather

similar name. All four strips are interesting, and this is the sort of fan project I'd like to see succeed. Jonny is his own best artist and writer, and once he learns which letratones will or will not print properly "Red Dragon" will no doubt be the mainstay of the fanzine--I just do hope S.A.S. manages a regular schedule, because otherwise 5, 6 or 9 page episodes of continued stories become a bit of a nonsense. If Jonny can't keep to his projected quarterly schedule at least, complete stories would be advisable!

WORLDS ≠9 (24 A5 pages for 18p from Mark Finch, Holly House, Harlton Rd, Little Eversden, Cambs) features an 8-page review of TV, film and comics SF in the order they're supposed to happen in, by someone who didn't like Star Wars, plus CE3K, a Bob Watkins 2-page strip, letters, 1990, and film and publishing news. This is a fanzine I'm starting to look forward to, and always enjoy reading -- I think you might, too.

WARK ≠12 (20 A5 pages for 30p from Rosemary Pardoe, Flat 2, 38 Sandown Lane, Liverpool 15) may seem less of a bargain, but it has properly reduced print, and a healthy attitude to fandom --or fandoms, I should say. As usual Mike Grace contributes thoughtful reviews of sundry comics fanzines, while Rosemary herself covers British fantasy zines and "other things", and a feature called "Never Mind the Sex Pistols, here's Alan Matheson" makes a brief appearance.

NEUTRON STAR, briefly mentioned last time, will not be appearing "very shortly"--Colin Brake says he may be able to revive the project next year, but printing costs and other commitments rule it out for now. And another zine to perish is SKYWOOD; ≠4 20 A5 pages for a 7p stamp from Donald Barr,

proclaims itself to be the final issue which is a pity, as it was unique among the zines around now, and improving steadily. More power than usual this time around, but also some very nice art, especially by Mark McKenzie.

I was hoping that the third issue of GRAPHIC SENSE (Something Different) would arrive in time for me to review it here, but I guess we can settle for ≠2, which boasted 20 Bem-size pages for 25p by post from Gez Kelly, whose address is in the boxed ad on the previous page. I must say it's a great improvement on the first issue, as reviewed in Bem-19, which itself was a highly promising start. GS/SD ≠2 has a colour cover by Alan Hunter, and inside is very reminiscent of PANELOLOGIST on many pages, though of course not as slickly produced as yet. Contributors include Maureen James, Dick Domar, Mark Chadbourn, Mark Finch, Theo Clarke and, on the art side, David Lloyd, Harry McAvinchey, Joe Matthews, and Pete Scott, which ought to be enough information to get you interested.

Incidentally, if you want to get in touch with any of the people I give addresses for, or our own editor come to that, and you want a reply but aren't actually buying anything, it is a good idea, or indeed held to be "common courtesy" in some circles, to put a stamped, self-addressed envelope in with your letter. Ask them when the next issue's out, or how much a subscription or a set of back issues would cost, or what sort of art they use -- but don't expect them to spend their own money to tell you. One or two letters like that would soon add up, and we don't want to bankrupt any fan-eds, do we?

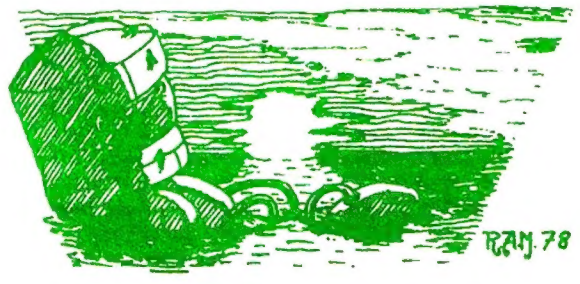
COMIC MEDIA NEWS INTERNATIONAL ≠37 45p for 28 A4 pages from Richard Burton,

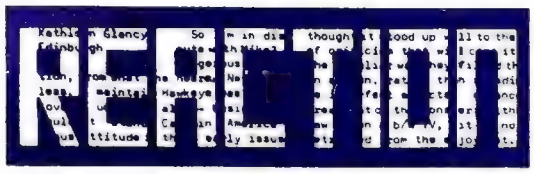
is a special X-Men issue, with art by Leach, Gibbons, Bolland, McMahon, Goring, and Simonson, and Chris Claremont interviewed by the indefatigable Mr Burton. Eric MacKenzie's "Dan Dire" 3-page strip doesn't appeal to me, but it is, I suppose, well done--but the backbone of the zine (other than Mike Conroy's comic reviews and Les Chester's fanzine comments, I hasten to add) is the news section; Marvel, DC, IPC, Film & TV, Dez...7 full pages. I gather that Richard's new job with Dez Skinn at British Marvel may jeopardise CMNI's future -- let's hope not, even though Martin's busy working out how to fit the "Britain's No.1 Newszine" banner into the Bem logo even as I write this. Could anybody else, Mike Conroy for instance, take over CMNI from Richard? Perhaps Richard would remain as the publisher, with Les Chester and the Conroys doing the editorial work? Perhaps, as Phil Clarke suggests, CMNI might be published by the British Marvel set-up? Let's wait and see.

Apart from being printed backwards (I think--the page order is certainly wrong, with the front cover on the back), FANZINE FANATIQUE ≠31 17p for 8 A5 pages from Keith & Rosemary Walker,

is another useful issue, with a paragraph of comment, plus ordering details, for about 50 fanzines from around the world. Noumenon, Something Different, Six Of One (the Prisoner Appreciation Society), Pittsburgh Fan Forum, Munich Round Up, Tardis, Karass, Arena, Bem ("UK's best comic newszine"), Cidereal Times...lots of interesting stuff, at least to me, covering SF, comics, "dungeons and dragons", and anything else that looks like a fanzine that Keith sees. A must for every fanzine publisher--Keith will trade his zine for yours.

Well, that's it for this time; with a column this long, I just hope I haven't reviewed anything twice; and if I have, I only hope my views are roughly the same in both places! -ED SALLIS





Theo Clarke The distinctly different appearance of Bem-20 was a resounding success in my eyes -- how's that for a mixed metaphor? The idea of presenting a full-length comic was a master-stroke, and its execution, whilst not faultless, bears repetition. Perhaps we can have something similar in a year or two's time?

As I say, "With This Loaf..." was not perfect, and the last few pages seemed to falter after the verve of the first part. Overall, the comic was excellent, but it was marred by small faults which would have needed only a little effort to rectify. Rather than undertake a tedious blow-by-blow "spot the fault" exercise I will take the cover as an example-- the inspired use of the Wonder Woman v. Superman cover as its basis was spoilt by the clumsy drawing of Captain Frog, whose head was unrelated to his body and whose left hand was, to say the least, weak and static. /(Strange about that left hand, because most artists look at their left hand while drawing it--check it out, most left hands in comics are drawn well, and are more predominant than right hands. That sounds soooo silly. Maybe Chris is left-handed?)/

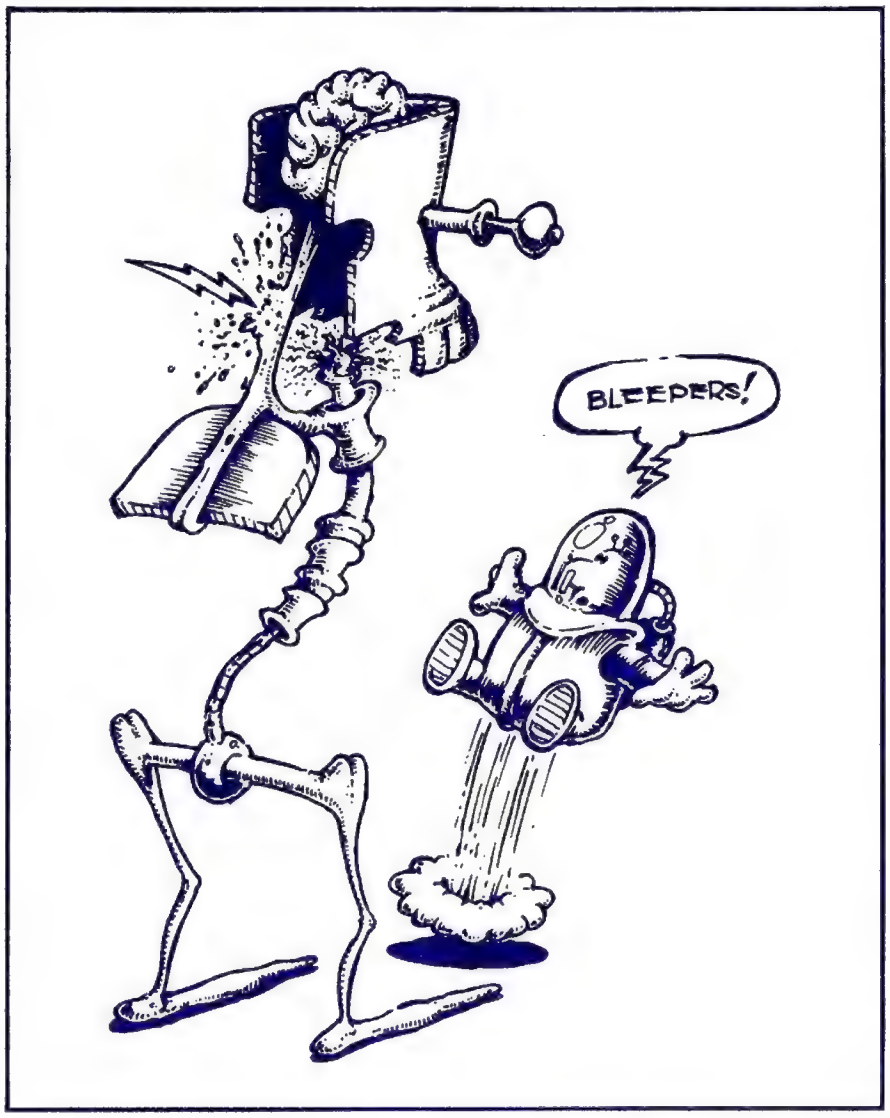
And so to the Comics News bonus-- or was Captain Frog the bonus? As usual the Eagle Awards produced no surprises; the surprises are always in the nominations, not the votes. However, the shock of reading the news about DC was quite sufficient for one day! I suspect that this amazing move from DC will improve the general quality of the line, due to the intensified competition between the staff. However, time will show... /(That savage DC cutback has numerous ramifications. First and foremost, it reminds everybody that Jenette Kahn is not the boss; the Warner executives are, and it's a cause for anxiety that they can, without much apparent warning or due forethought, step in and make such a drastic move, the timing of which, after all the "DC Explosion" pre-publicity, was disastrous. It doesn't take much to imagine the atmosphere at DC at the moment. Also, it makes one wonder about the state of the industry generally, if DC's comics line does deserve such a trimming.)/

I think that Mike got the wrong end of the stick with John Dakin's point about comic-type TV series. I thought that John was saying that he disliked TV series which were written in the style of comic-books, and not that he disliked the comics based on such programmes. /(C'est vrai (quite an influential strip, that Cap'n Frog))/ My lack of enthusiasm for the boob-tube renders me unqualified to comment on such programmes, but I must say that I have found that the spin-off strips appear to have been restricted by the original, rather than improved by the existence of this previous visualization. This also applies to film adaptations, despite the observations of Brian Lewis at Comicon.

With regard to Mike's comment about D.C. Thomson's failure to produce an SF comic, and Steve Noble's reaction to it, has anyone noticed that D.C. Thomson always avoid confrontation with IPC, and also their present policy seems to involve the nurturing of "Scoop" and "Plug", rather than pushing new ventures onto the market.

Eek! A non-Superswipe logo in Bem! Geoffrey Whittaker's logo was pleasantly different, but the letters could have been picked out by shading to make the words slightly more legible. /(Since Geoff probably spent a lot of time designing the logo, I don't blame him for ensuring people don't just give it a cursory glance)/

And finally to FT... "Boggo" is brilliant! I trust that he will become a regular feature, and may eventually get into Bem. Barry K. Winetrobe should be shot for suggesting that Peake's Titus Trilogy should be produced in comic form. The Trilogy stands by itself -- complete as a literary creation, and not requiring somebody else's visualization to make it come alive.



Dave Harwood asks "why we read comics that we know to be very poor products in their field", and this prompts me to point out that one cannot tell how good a comic is by looking at the cover or first page; one must read the whole thing if one is to form a valid opinion of the quality of the item. /(But you can surmise the quality of a comic by glancing at the first page, if the credits are on it; if not, then try the second page. That's the criterion I apply to all the comics not on my "automatic buy" list.)/ Furthermore, since most of us do not have access to comics which we can borrow, we must buy the damn things -- and then grin and bear it if our purchases do not make the grade.

Bye bye, Mr Cruden. /(So long, Theo.)/

Steve Gibson To be honest, I didn't think much of 'Captain Frog', as I don't like satire very much and the artwork gave me the impression that he drew the story overnight, as he used too many close-up shots of CF's face, and not enough full figure shots, or detailed background. Still, that's just my personal opinion, I imagine there were plenty of people who liked it...and when it comes down to personal taste, I imagine Chris isn't particularly impressed by my art. Now onto something I did like: Bem was as good as usual, though it seemed to suffer from the drop in pages (due obviously to CF), and FT was interesting this time around, especially the opinion piece from Barry Winetrobe.

Hunt Emerson Ta for the Bem and CAPTAIN FROG. Great! Definitely more of these, far as I'm concerned! It's just right for what it is -- short & whacky, doesn't labour itself, well drawn, not fussy & cluttered but lively. The concorde is beautiful-- like George Erling's work.

Oh, yes, I like the way Chris Ash did the colour separations to fit poor registration. Very clever.

Kathleen Glancy It's me, folks-- the first feature writer to be pre-empted for a commercial. It came as a relief, actually, as I couldn't think what to do next and now have twice as long to think about it.

I find it hard to credit that anyone, much less Mike, could sympathise with the Captain America of the early AVENGERS. /(Surprise! Under this harsh exterior lurks a slightly less harsh interior.)/ He was nauseating at the time, so prosy, so pious, so always in the right, whose only human trait was whining self-pity over Bucky (he wasn't sorry for Bucky, he was sorry for Cap having lost Bucky) and blaming himself for his loss-- which was only his fault in his initial acceptance of the boy as a partner for no valid reason. After all, if he'd said a firm "no", what could Bucky have done? He was too goody-goody to reveal Cap's identity for spite, and even if he had, since Rogers had no family, it wouldn't really have mattered. /(Even though Cap being sorry for Cap sounds good, I don't think you've got a case. I can't recall Cap ever exclaiming "Damned inconsiderate of Bucky, to get himself killed like that. Who am I going to explain all my adventures to now?" Wasn't the anguish more, or completely, over Bucky being so young when he exploded off the scene? And particularly since he was responsible for his junior partner, regardless of the reasons.)/ He was also a glory-hog. None of his partners, except the Scarlet Witch, liked him --and with her it was that she was attracted to leader-types, having already cast her eyes on Magneto, Namor, and Cyclops -- and I couldn't really blame them. And I could not agree that Hawkeye went in for "underhand scheming" to gain the leadership; he made no secret of his feelings, to Cap least of all. /(I seem to recall him hoping that the Avengers under Cap's leadership would not be overwhelmingly successful, in the hope that the others would then ask him to be their guiding light. Also, when Goliath (formerly Giant-Man) returned, Hawkeye was bitterly disappointed, because that meant he was demoted to third-in-line to the throne. To conclude; he was quite a cad.)/

As for Wolverine -- he has twice deliberately struck intending to kill, and to kill slowly and painfully by disembowelling, and on one of these occasions he thought he had killed and was exultant about it. Both times the beings he struck were, by supernatural and scientific means, not made of human flesh and thus not killed. He didn't know they weren't made of human flesh when he struck. That he has never so struck at someone who was made of human flesh is a cop-out. I could go on about him, but since my opinion appears in the organ of the X-Men fan club, VERTIGO (enquiries to G.F. Willmetts,

and can I have the fiver now, Geoff?), I won't. All I will say is if, Mike, the deliberate disembowelling of a fellow being strikes you as the manifestation of a sensitive nature, well, if I were Sue I'd go home to mother as fast as possible. /(If seeing first her pantry (at George Street) then her spare bedroom (at Sandringham Road) completely taken over by comics didn't send Sue scurrying home to Mum, then something as insignificant as misplaced sympathies fades into unimportance. But, you realize that by labelling Wolverine as a psychopath you're saying he is insane? Would Prof Xavier select an insane person for his merry band? I can't recall the two incidents when he tried to kill somebody, but presumably (I hope) the two somebodies were enemies. Trying to kill enemies, who were probably trying to kill him, is a lot saner than simply trying to disable them, which is what most comic-book heroes feel themselves morally bound to do. Chris Claremont in the latest (sorry, Martin) CMNI said that the others were perceiving Wolverine as "less of a psychotic.")/ Wolvie's double appearance in the Eagle Awards listings, incidentally, brings me to the conclusion that you people out there are even weirder than I first thought.

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Neil Poulton Bem & FT were enjoyable, but somehow to me Captain Frog just didn't make the grade. The whole thing seemed to be a rip-off of the Pink Panther--minus half the humour. Sure, in places it was funny, but the gaps inbetween were too long. Chris couldn't seem to decide to do an all-out comedy or a serious strip, and ended up with a compromise. I've never really liked Captain Frog, and the massive fold through the centre didn't help the issue any. That's one of my pet hates. You'd have thought that fanzine editors would realise that a lot of readers are condition freaks (a crease through a comic ruins it, in my opinion) -- and as such would send zines flat.

A Thundermole strip in the same format as Captain Frog might be enjoyable; anyway, I was still pleased to get 50p worth of reading for 25p.

Bem and CMN made a total mockery of the Eagle Award presentations at the Con by announcing the results beforehand. When Mike Conroy read the awards out, almost everyone knew all the results in advance. /(Which Richard Burton and I had talked about --but we couldn't think of any way round the problem. Bem-20 had to be mailed out before the Con, as it did include con information--and putting the results in this issue would have made them rather stale news! Reading out the Awards at the Con is a nice idea; but there doesn't seem to be any way to make them a surprise and still get the news to non-attending fans within two months. -ML)/

Now that I've started on about the Con does anyone mind if I go on about it a bit more? The whole thing was pretty good, and worth the price of admission -- just getting into the dealers room was worth that, gods what a crowd. Of all the tables Colin Campbell seemed to be doing the most business -- I suppose it was because he was selling u/gs and specialist publications, it wasn't 'cause of his imports, anyway.

When McGregor went up on the stage on the Saturday the applause was deafening -- everybody roared their hearts out. I don't think the Queen, or Bob Dylan for that matter, has ever had anything comparable to that. His answering of questions was fairly interesting, but when he started to read that rather long SF story from Dragonflame 2 everyone's attention drifted away at one point or another. Not that the story was boring -- it was just so damn long. Nobody really had the right concentration for a story after the events of the day. But, still, McGregor went down very well with the audience. His answers to many of the questions cast a new light on the "happy Marvel family", and gave a good insight behind the scenes of the comics industry.

Dear Chris,

Wow! Captain Frog number one was ace! Wow! That was great where he hit Stuporman, it's great seeing him again. Wow! And the girls. Wow. It's nice to see a really adult comic. You're a very good writer. And an artist too. Wow. I ran all the way to the newsagent to get Captain Frog one and it didn't have a free gift. Wow. It was great. Can I have a no-prize, 'cause Ripcord should be spelt with an "R". Wow. Do you think I'll be a great comic book artist when I grow up? I've sent you my own drawings to have a look at. I did them all myself. No copying. Bet you're surprised someone as young as me can do drawings like that. Wow. I'll be available for any comic-book work from next month if you think I'm that good. Wow. Fancy you thinking I'm good enough to do comics. Or comic-magazines as I call them. Wow.

Well, till Maigret has migraine, Bake Bine Bem! -Otto Bonaparte, The Marvin Wolfman Home For The Retarded, Dinky Dell, Nutwood. /(If ya think "With This Loaf..." was a knockout, Ot ol' chum, wait'll ya see what Cuddly Chris has got lined up for the next special, it'll really bake yer Bem!)/

Z.I. Ahmad Bem 20 was far from the best issue. Why, you ask? Well, for a start, you are the editor, not as it seemed Chris Ash; why could you not sell those 16 pages of uninspired trash separately, and return Bem's regular GREAT features. Is Frog a parody or a satire? It does not fill the bill for either. The typically stereotyped "french talk" was annoying to such an extent that it was an effort to read through. How could you include that stupid Stuporman, was it really that necessary to use him, or can't Chris be bothered to make up his own character? Sorry Martin, but no dice, must go. Thank God it is only for one issue; please, no more in the future. However, Chris Ash's art was very good; though not brilliant he does have a style suited for the type of story he intended, and which did fulfil the function designated well.

I know a lot of people will talk about Don McGregor; but I must add that if only to take his popularity on the decibels of clapping and applause we all thought him just great. Care flowed out of the man.

Alan Wright As usual Reaction was the most interesting part of the issue. I usually turn to it first of all, just as I always turn first to the letter column of every comic I read -- does that signify something? I can't agree with Ian Abrahams' and Mike's comments about HOWARD THE DUCK; for me it is one of the most consistently enjoyable & thought-provoking comics around. The recent attack on Anita (SOOFI) Bryant in HTD 21 particularly appealed to me because I am gay. It's heartening that Steve Gerber should be coming out so forcefully against the bigotry she has recently stirred up against homosexuals in the States, and though the story didn't specifically mention homosexuality (the CCA would have had a fit!), anyone who reads the newspapers would have understood the story. The reactionary letters published in issue 26 in response to the story caused me some anger, but Steve's reply to them was powerful stuff. /(I often feel I'm not getting maximum enjoyment out of Howard because I don't recognise what is being satirised.)/

And while we're on the subject, Maureen James "can think of one thing that women couldn't do without men" (Red Sonja Interview), but I know some lesbians who'd take issue with her on that point! Tsk tsk, how self-oppressive. And why, pray, does she have to preface her comments in the lettercol by saying that she's not a "lunatic libber"? What on earth is one of them? Either she believes in the 7 demands of the Women's Liberation Movement (see Spare Rib #71 for a resumé of these) or she doesn't--either she's a feminist or she isn't.

I'll stay on my soapbox a moment longer. I feel sorry for Simon Booth if he won't read Ms Marvel because of its title. It's his loss if he allows his bigotry to interfere with his enjoyment. In the meantime, Simon, ponder this: the word Ms is an attempt at balancing a language which reflects a patriarchal society --okay, so achieving sexual equality is more important than tinkering with the language, but language is nevertheless significant. "Find out who controls the definitions and you have a pretty good clue who controls everything else". (Ellen Willis, in Rolling Stone #225.)

Fannish activity seems to be on the increase of late -- a healthy sign. Perhaps it's a reaction to the commercialisation of comic marts, except that I get the feeling that less people are attending London marts than did a year or two ago.

Ian Abrahams I was sorry to hear of the advertising problem Phil Hall has with MEDIA. I wonder why advertisers are avoiding it, perhaps they are thinking of the phrase "cheap and nasty", and connecting it with cheap ads. Can't think why though, I would imagine with lots of reviews & plugs the following it has is increasing. Concerning COMICS UNLIMITED, it's hard to regain enthusiasm--I suppose that was what Alan was doing when he gave CU its "new look". If someone like Paul Jay takes over editing the fanzine, then it's safe; but if something isn't done quickly then CU is as good as dead. That would be a great shame, as for many people CU is the first fanzine they read; due to ads in the UK Marvel weeklies it becomes natural for CU to be the first stepping stone into fandom. /(Alan has had a commendable run on CU, probably the longest one-man show in the history of British fandom, but it would be nice if CU were passed on to more enthusiastic hands, rather than allowed to die, especially now that it's the last of the traditional article-orientated fanzines.)/

On to Reaction: Like Kath Glancy, I liked Hawkeye as a character. The thing Mike seems to miss when discussing Hawkeye is that he was the natural leader. Look, Captain America had been out of cold storage for about a year before the first major rearrangement of the Avengers, which let in Quicksilver, the Scarlet Witch and Hawkeye. One year in which to learn enough about a world which he had been out of for 20 years -- I'm sure he couldn't catch up in just one year. That should have ruled him out of the leadership of what was a major group, he quite simply didn't know enough about the new world he had been forced into. Scarlet Witch and Quicksilver should also have been ruled out, because the public, as portrayed in comics, wouldn't trust mutants. That leaves Hawkeye, who was the only "normal" member of the Avengers at that time -- plus he had been a criminal (until he reformed) of only minor repute, failing to defeat Iron Man. I can therefore argue that he'd know just how criminal minds work, through meeting them. I just think that Hawkeye should have been the leader then, and I'm pleased to see him around again. I think of him as one of the greatest superheroes ever. /(An intelligent man like Steve Rogers should easily be able to assimilate what he needs (technology & political situations) in a year. And if the government would be reluctant to deal with mutants, they'd be equally reluctant to deal with a former criminal. Also remember that CA had years of assignment experience as an individual, a member of a team, and in a group.)/

I suppose Rich Morrissey was aiming at me when he said he had a higher opinion of Nova "than your reviewer does". I wasn't reviewing the whole series, just issue 19, and I felt justified writing about it the way I did. Issues 1-16 were very good, but I can't say the same for issues 19 & 20, though I've not yet read 17 & 18. Nova remains one of my favourite characters. /(After a distinctly unpromising beginning Nova rapidly went downhill, until the arrival of charmin' Carmine, who seems to have added impetus, or at least gloss, to Marvin's stories.)/

Rob MacGillivray I certainly hope Bem-20 was an exeption. I enjoyed the Captain Frog adventur but wood have preffered to have the usuall colums that have bilt this fanzine to it's high standered. Couldn't Capt. Frog have got his own zine for a wile, like "Baragrin" did?

Why has Tery Moor got a fettish for poeple/things riding things/poeple? Why is he takeing over the art side of the zine? Why is Thunder mole consistantly beyond standereds of excelence? Has he scene his docter about it? Why does Barry K. Winetub speak out of the rong orifise? What makes you think I'm a Tangerene Dream fan?

Mr Cruden, I think you are at fault --why should the Arab anuall (HTD) be satirical, bittingly humorous or even realy funny? None (or very few) of these things occour in the averege comic book, and the fact that they are their in even small numbars automatticaly pushes it above the level. Therfor it is a higher levell comic book, espesialy when you add on the fact that it poseses an extremly high amount of charectorisation and originality in plot and consept. /(Yes, the HTD annual was above yer average cabbage in the muck-heap comic, but Gerber wasn't up to his usual messiah status; but there again, he never claimed to be infallible, fandom did it for him.)/

How about puting fan art on the covers, like Fantasy Trader dooes? /(Lucky you, then, getting the best of both worlds.)/

PS: Please do alter the spelling, I know its appaulllingg. /(Don't worry, Rob--we've been through your letter carefully, and made lots of alterations. It's all write now--trust us, nobody will ever know that you're a rotten speller!)/

People.

Captain Frog mark one. AN EVENT!

"Panther's Rage", "Cat" -- and now "With This Loaf I Bring Pain". The sheer lyricism and profundity of this epic literally BOUNDS off the printed page, creating a majestic addition to the discerning fan's library.

The 'Zendiq' origin may have lost some of its topicality, but this new adventure is certainly superior to the Asteroid saga, and in its own way offers competition to those Editions Francais; witty interplay and sly visual jokes push this past the usual efforts of fan humour. There's a hint of Howard the Duck in the way comic conventions are spoofed, and a hint of Max Smart in Le Cap's ability to come up clean, complete with a very Bondian crack about Roast Pork.

The art itself is impressive because, unlike much fan art, it's done in a breezy, confident style, and though it's superficially cartoon art, a quick glance at some of the "dramatic" fan stuff with its clumsy compositions, sub-Adams layouts and cloddish finish shows that it's Capitaine Grenouille who's Le Top.

To go into depth, I liked the Basil Wolverton-ish Ripcorde fuelled by Guinness, the revealing Miss Liberty --and that fabulous Flying Frogjet. Tops for me also was Stuporman's characteristic reaction to anything different, which really digs down deep into the twisted psyche of the man from Megopolis, and the protesters at JFK. Frankly, I fail to see how anyone can take umbrage at a comic in which everyone is intentionally a stereotype, but I'm sure if you put a black man in they would.

But what of the future? Where is Captain Frog's dreaded enemy from the Sureté, the fanatical cop who tracks down Rene with blatant disregard for life, limb and his duties as a police officer? Perhaps, in keeping with The Master (Claremont), the cop should be a foreigner. Barry Foster mayhap? Mayhap not. How about a meeting with the New Avengers? Or Tin-Tin, his immortality wearing off, desperate to find a hairdresser as skilled as Captain Faggot?

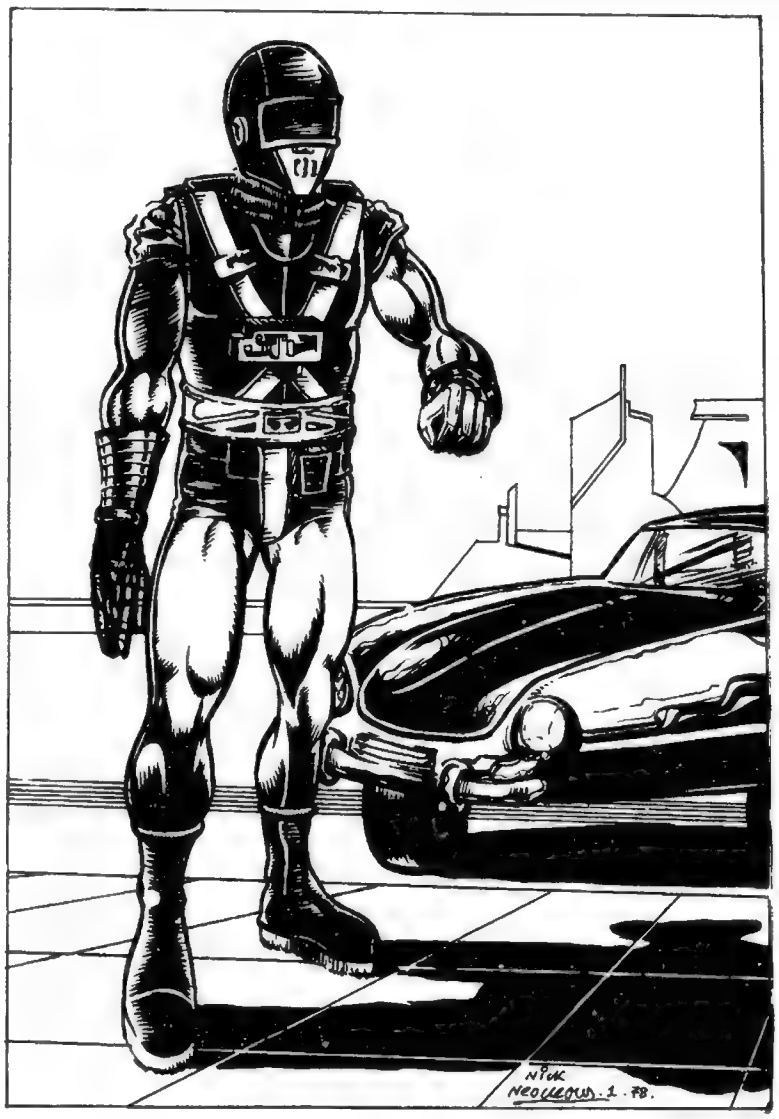
I'm sure you'll come up with something.....metaphysical. -Eric Semon LeFountonrouy, 5551 Le Guaranga Rd, Melon Grove, Sequoischia, Flnge, USA. /(What can this anteater do but hand you over to Chris himself, Rick? "I laboured long and hard over that issue of Frog, so find it humbly gratifying that some of you appreciated all the psyche-exploration and didactic techniques that went into the make-up of the story. Et merci aussi, mon ami, for supporting the somewhat different art-style I chose for the good Captain. Bon santé!" At least, he <u>said</u> he was Chris...)/

Christopher Simon It was sad to hear of Kamandi being cancelled with #59. I've been a great fan of Kirby's work for a long time, even regarding his most recent work as stimulating, imaginative, and, in a sense, very advanced comics. The dialogue is strange but, far from being clichéd, he is expressing his characters in a new, bizarre, and often successful way. Anyway, Kirby gave Kamandi a very good start, and his successors continued the tradition, although occasionally missing the niceties of the Kirby morality, creating a very interesting, unique world. I don't know why it survived so long -- I suppose kids liked the animals. I thought the stories were intriguing, and often very funny--let's hope it's revived soon.

Tim Wallis Let's have some more full-length strips--but how about a serious one? Fandom seems to find it much easier to poke fun at things than to create ideas of their own. True, Captain Britain deserves it -- but wouldn't creation be better than tearing things down?

Maybe if I could draw...

Thank God WARLORD survived the DC Disaster -- and going monthly yet! I hope Joe Rubinstein remains on inks, he's quickly catching up on Terry Austin as my favourite inker.



Nigel R. Balloch I was surprised at how much I liked Captain Frog -- I suppose that it's really more suited to this format. Is there any chance of a regular Bem comic alternating between Captain Frog & Thundermole, or don't you think it would sell? By the way, whatever did happen to Bemusing Stories? /(Only one artist ever completed his assignment; after their first enthusiastic responses to the scripts or stories, the rest just vanished...strange, eh? -ML)/

In reply to Mike's comment of a few issues back about what the Society of Comics Enthusiasts can do, I'd like to make a few comments. Already the Society is producing a regular newsletter with letters and reviews; the newsletter is already like a mini-fanzine, and I hope to improve it further. The Comics Review is now coming out at least four times a year, and the second issue that Maureen James will be editing will have a page count of 40. Then we've also got the first issue of the Society's adzine coming out in October. By the end of the year there will have been at least one mart for fans to go along and talk to each other. And of course there will be cheap imports. /(Newsletter, marts, fanzine, adzine--these have all been done perfectly well before, and by individuals. Bram Stokes is now doing cheap imports, though for only those fortunate/unfortunate enough to live in the capital. I acknowledge that I haven't seen your publications, so they might be different in nature to others, but I still can't see an awful lot that only the Society as a society is accomplishing.)/

In the comics themselves, once we have got a few more members, anything that was <u>very strongly</u> felt wrong with any comic could be influenced by the Society in many ways. People <u>do not</u> like to be flooded with petitions and complaints. The main aims of the Society, however, are to improve comic fandom's relations with SF fandom, and the public. /(How are you going to influence the content of comics, and how are you going to improve fandom's relations?)/

The only comment I've got about the main Bem section is, please keep the super-reductions--as long as you've the time to do the extra typing.

Isn't it surprising that CMN got the most votes for the fanzine category in the Eagle Awards? /(Just as surprising as Bem winning the ballots Bem handled.)/

Pete Scott Glancing thru Reaction the first interesting point I noticed was Ian Abrahams' mention of the "Kurse of Kirby". Poor old Jack. To give him his due, I think he can still come up with something that's at least interesting now and then, but on the whole his work since the creative impetus which gave rise to the old 'Fourth World' series fizzled out really does constitute a shocking study in decline. He used to be the industry's most vital figure ("Dedicated to Jack Kirby, without whom there may not have been any comics to write a history about"), and look at him now; everything he touches turns to shit.

Strange that of all his more recent comics, KAMANDI should have enjoyed the longest uninterrupted run. I always felt (not that I'm necessarily the most reliable of pundits) that, with its futuristic settings, multiplicity of non-human characters, and general lack of intersection points with reality as experienced by most 8-14 year-olds, it was the least commercially viable of the lot--next to DEVIL DINOSAUR, of course. I seem to recall Jack implying in an early issue that the 'Great Disaster' was actually some sort of natural catastrophe, but, just the same, the imagery was always inescapably post-Nuclear. Come to think of it, things have now reached the stage where a nuclear explosion or large-scale leakage of radiation would constitute a natural catastrophe.

I also noticed the bit about "a certain dealer" gloating about extorting £17.50 out of some sucker for a copy of GL/GA #76. I recall that when I wrote to Colin Campbell complaining about his having accepted an as in which that comic was listed at £16, he came on all huffy like an insulted faggot and laid some double-talk on me about how such dealers have "injected a vigorous degree of competition into an area that was becoming stultified with the complacency of a seller's market." Also, he would have had me believe that "this new blood has helped expand the total market and has brought cheaper comics to the fans." All of which I regarded with one eyebrow raised, I'm very much afraid; though I readily admit to being a nasty, grouchy old cynic. /(I'd have thought that the reaction of many dealers, upon seeing such comics priced so highly, would be to price theirs at a similar price, with the reasoning of "If he can get £16 for it, I'd be a fool to accept anything less.")/

A tip of the hat to John Foster, the only LoCer to comment on how superb (sic!) my cover for FT 30 was. What a pleasure it is to encounter a man of such obvious good taste now and then. Does anyone know what has become of Alan Matheson, incidentally? I haven't heard from him for yonks, and my last attempts to reach him have gone unanswered. He's been chained to the wall of one of D.C. Thomson's cells, most likely, and condemned to endlessly rehash the adventures of Lord Snooty & his gang.

I didn't vote in the Eagle Awards, and I must say that I don't find the results especially interesting. I'm pleased that SAVAGE SWORD came top in its category, because it's a rare and pleasing fusion of artistic (for want of a better word) and commercial considerations--but that's about it. I've been very critical of Robert E. Howard in the past, but I must admit that I'm starting to develop a grudging fondness for his books as a result of the various Marvel mags featuring Conan. Of all his creations I like Bran Mak Morn best, largely, I suspect, because I have a deep and abiding love of the British countryside, and Howard was able to hint at its magic, its wild beauty in his tales of the Pictish king. I can only lament that he didn't write more of 'em. Marvel's adaptation of "Worms Of The Earth" incorporated some very evocative illustrations, too, and was arguably one of their 'best' ever.

Mike Gold
New York

A couple of corrections. The 50 cent format did not fail to sell as well as hoped; we have yet (August 2nd) to receive any sales information, and we certainly didn't have any last June 22nd when the changes came down. Nor did we have any reluctance from wholesalers--the changes were solely made on the basis of declining sales over the past two or three decades and the deterioration of the distribution system itself.

Paul Kupperberg is still employed here at DC as a public relations assistant; however he is so employed on a free-lance basis. Paul these days is also writing for Marvel Comics.

Furthermore, there were six (not two) books promoted from bi-monthly to monthly status: Men of War, Super Friends, DC Comics Presents, Weird Western, Brave & Bold and Warlord.

As noted in the other fanzines, many of the features you listed as cancelled have been shifted over to the Dollar Comics--All Star, Batman Family (into Detective), Fighting Forces, Black Lightning, Doorway to Nightmare; and many of the back-up features are going into Dollar Comics as well: Hawkman, Human Target... We're keeping a few other projects around for a new Dollar Comic or two: Firestorm, Star Hunters, Deserter, Kamandi. We'll see about that -- our present plans call for an expansion of the Dollar Comics line next summer, although the Spectaculars are likely to be reinstated at that time.

Odd you call it a disaster...you seem to have missed a vital point most other fanzines picked up on: obviously, the least talented people will be those who receive less (or no) work, so the average DC book will improve in quality.

By the way, when you look at the number of titles, half the line was not cancelled, only 9 books a month: DC used to print 32, and now print 23.

Keep in touch.

Reply

Thank you for the letter commenting on Bem's presentation of the news of the, er, "DC Implosion". It's very useful to get this sort of feedback; however, it would have been even better to have received a news release at the time, rather than having to rely on second-hand sources. When I had to go to press, the situation was far from clear, and indeed the very welcome news of the return of Kamandi, Star Hunters, Deserter and Firestorm in a new Dollar Comic or two only reached me in your letter!

I must take issue with some of your comments: it was announced in June that DC Comics Presents and Weird Western Tales were going monthly, before the Implosion came along, and Men of War is also already monthly. I was thinking Super Friends was too, and only counting the promotion of Brave & Bold and Warlord as really new -- it looks as if I should have said three, rather than two, but definitely not six!

And I never said half DC's titles per month were being cancelled. Half the titles, yes--but they're almost all bimonthly. Half the number of pages per month, yes, compared with what was being planned -- around 540 pages instead of 1100, due to the cut-back from 25 pages per title to 17. I must agree that to call the Implosion "The Great DC Disaster" was being a trifle melodramatic, however, since Kamandi was among the cancelled books, it had a certain tie-in, and to those of us who've been watching, appreciating, and enjoying the flowering of DC under Jenette Kahn, this news was a disaster.

But, life goes on, and, as the news section proper on the back page did comment, we can expect most of the completed work to appear in the Dollar Comics, as back-ups, or in the remaining anthology titles. Using a bit of guess-work, I was able to mention the link to the new distribution system, and talk of a "slimmer ...more viable operation" -- I hope everything goes well.

One piece of news I hope isn't true says you're leaving DC next Friday; I appreciate all the help you've given fanzines like Bem, and I hope this work will continue.

Sir.

On behalf of the Special Branch, and all at Victoria Street, may I convey my thanks for a real good laugh. This Frog fellow is better than DAN DIRE any day -- hope to see more soon. That's an order (Ha Ha). PS: Two known felons, Otto Bonaparte and Eric Semon "Forky the Snake" LeFountonrouy, have been seen in your vicinity. Word to the wise, and all. Evenin'. -Detective Chief Inspector Dratsab, Special Branch. /(Sounds like a fair cop, GB!)/

Simon Booth

Annoying really, the effect statistics can have; the sight of them all arranged on a page frequently forces me to enter into all sorts of strange calculations. Amuses little kiddies like me for hours, it does.

I'm afraid that I must speak out against the views of about a third of Bem's readership; I don't see how Neal Adams can really be voted favourite comic book artist, particularly for the second year. The Eagle Awards are supposed to be for work published in the previous year (1977) --it seems odd that Adams should top the poll, considering he has done virtually no actual comix for some time. Posters etc yes, but the award is for "favourite comic book artist" --so why do people vote for somebody who now has little to do with comic books. True, he is probably the best of those nominated, though ever since Captain Marvel #29 I have had a great liking for Starlin's work, but in 1977 he did very little that could be classed as comics, while Starlin produced a reasonably large amount of high-quality stuff, right?

DC did much better this year in both the official and Bem results, winning five Bem categories and four official ones. Steve Englehart, Marshall Rogers, Terry Austin, Batman, and Detective. Well done, gang, but what about next year, DC fans? And there certainly are a lot of them lurking around Bem. For example, in the favourite villain poll, while Thanos still won, the Joker gained a lot of votes, chiefly at the expense of Dr Doom, while in the poll for favourite team everybody, even lettercol darlings the X-Men, lost votes to the Justice Society.

As with all such things, there are a few anomalies. I don't see how the Hulk black & white magazine could get a smaller percentage of votes from Bem readers than it does overall as favourite b&w magazine, and yet gets a higher percentage, and position, in the favourite new title category. Mind you, I'm glad that horrible John Carter mag didn't win in Bem at least; to be honest I can't think of any new titles worthy of praise. It is also difficult to gauge the average age of Bem's readers. The results of category 12 suggest that they are generally younger, since the Surfer has not appeared in his own right for some time; it could be, though, that they're clever and agree with me--I think the Surfer has had his day, and any of the other four, if done properly, could be more worthwhile series. Category 21, with Eisner doing much better and Kirby not so well, betrays a generally greater experience, not to mention taste. I'm rather pleased that both my nominations for this, Eisner and Steranko, got on the voting form, although glancing at the official figures, it seems Kirby did better than either; a horrifying thought.

To be honest, Kirby has done a lot for comics over the years, and I suppose he ought to get something before he kicks the bucket. However when I see the Eagle results I don't think of Kirby's innovatory early 60's work, but of his mutilation of the Panther, and then I compare that with the Spirit--and that's no kind of comparison at all. Bem readers also seem to have more knowledge and

opinions on the U.K. scene; significantly higher percentages actually voted in, for example, categories 19 & 20. One final point -- I wouldn't really agree that the total vote has all that large a proportion of casual readers; the distribution of forms was mainly in zines and specialist shops, and anyway, "casual" readers would not be able to vote in many categories which referred to specific titles and issues. /(I just have this crazy idea that Bem readers are more knowledgeable than average... -ML)/

I thought the Comicon was very good, and enjoyed myself very much, although I had to leave just before the end of Don McGregor's speech. Talking of Don McGregor, I'm forced to disagree with Barry Winetrobe. While I'm sure Barry didn't intend to accuse Don of "rip-off pretension" he does seem to imply that his work is too highly thought of, which I don't think is true. Don's writing is not necessarily "weird", it is just good -- I feel that he can do a perfectly "acceptable" superhero script, it's the extra thought and originality he puts in that make a merely competent and entertaining plot into a work of art. No writer in comics has thought through "characterisation" so fully and portrayed the characters and their relationships in such a way as to be meaningful to so many. The first McGregor comic I got was in the autumn of 1974 when I was 12, and it appealed to me then as something special. His books appeal more to me now, and in four years time will probably mean even more. A comic, or anything, that can retain its hold for so long is rare, and to my mind worthy of something more than a quick dismissal as being 'pretentious'.

The question of rip-off dealers and excessive prices seems to come down to this; are dealers justified in charging ridiculous prices, when fans are prepared to pay them? How can mart organisers decide which dealers are out to exploit fandom? The exclusion of all dealers charging high prices would probably put a stop to these rip-off dealers, and deter others from entering the field, while forcing the fan-dealers to keep prices low. Great, huh? There has to be a catch...I suppose eventually no dealer would be making a profit and so all would cease dealing.

I wonder if Mike hasn't interrupted this letter because he agrees with everything I say, or because he can't read it? /(Yeah, I wonder?)/

Frank Thorne

I've been learning a lot about the fandom scene in Britain these past days. I must confess to being fairly ignorant on most subjects; chief among them is the inner workings of the followers of comics and fantasy stuff. The practical business of doing comics and how it all works escapes me at times--I've been at it off and on for thirty years, perhaps in another thirty I'll have it figured out.

Meanwhile, magazines like BEM help to clear up many points. It is manifest that I must have been insane to choose this course all those years ago. Divine madness. I love the pursuit.

Never have I loved any involvement more than the 17 RED SONJA books; they, and my involvement, were the best. So naturally then, give my sentiments to Maureen James for her RED SONJA interview; it was well done, and almost as much fun as drawing the Hyrkanian.

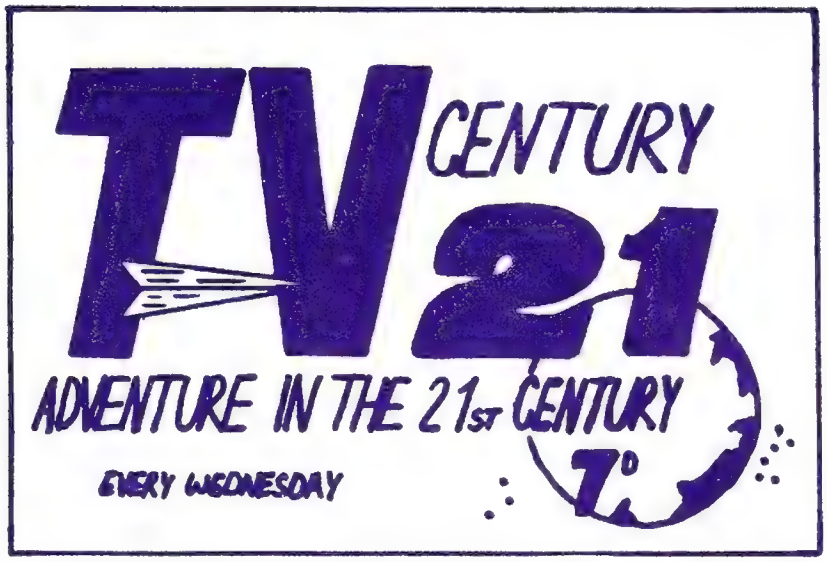
Colin French

Thanks for another well-produced issue of Bem, even if it was a little sparse. Your presentation has improved to match the content, and not a swipe in sight! There was talk a while back of the debt fans owed to six fan-eds who were holding fandom together; we'd better hope that SuperEm & BatBurton can do it alone.

I can't say the Eagle Awards produced many surprises; it seems that to predict the results you take equal measures of considered fandom opinion and Bullpen Bulletins. I can't understand why DC have never bothered to churn out a regular page of rabble-rousing. /(Don't Ms Kahn's publishorials fit the bill?)/ Adams wins best artist on former glories alone, while in the Roll Of Honour category we can choose between three men who can't be bothered with comics any longer, a clapped-out hack, and an inanimate object--very honourable!

I was not pleased to see the Capt. Frog supplement. The blue printing didn't help the scribbly art, especially in the solid black (blue) areas he uses frequently, and the story wasn't particularly funny, relying on predictable French or superhero jokes rather than a basically funny situation or characters, although I loved André (not literally, you understand). /(I'd say Captain Frog was basically a funny character.)/ My real gripe, though, is that it took valuable space from Bem. I would much rather have bought it as a separate item--but then many people wouldn't have bothered ordering it.

It was pleasing to see only one person took exception to my assessment of British funnies, and then with its style rather than the truth of it. Like "Scooby-Doo" or the testcard, they don't even rate a Yech. Blandness incarnate by any other name would still be...



W.SHEEHAN

All the comics listed below are WANTED. They must be in at least NEAR MINT condition. I will pay your price, providing that it is reasonable, and depending upon condition and value of the item. You MUST send an S.A.E. with all enquiries, or you will not get a reply.

DC COMICS

ACTION; 643, 466, 468, 478, 482-84

BATMAN; 283-87, 291, 294, 296-300

BATMAN FAMILY; 6, 9-13, 15-18

BEOWULF; 6

BRAVE & BOLD; 129, 131-33, 135, 136, 138-48 and 1 spect. of 1978

CHALLENGERS OF THE UNKNOWN; 86, 87.

CLAW; 6 and 9

DC SUPERSTARS; 18

DETECTIVE; 437, 466-68, 471-73, 475-77

DOORWAY TO NIGHTMARE; 3

HOUSE OF MYSTERY; 250-252, 254-260.

JOKER; 8 & 9

PHANTOM STRANGER; 2-4, 8-10, 15, 17, 19, 20, 24 and 40

SUPERMAN; 302, 313, 315, 307-9, 319-21, 323-325

SUPERMAN FAMILY; 170-90

SWAMP THING; 1-10, 11, 12, 19, 20, 22, 24, 25 and original Saga 1-3

WARLORD; 1-15

WONDER WOMAN; 1978 1 Spectacular

WORLDS FINEST; 239, 243-51

DC $.2 TABLOIDS:

The following are wanted in MINT CONDITION:
(a) "Famous First Edition of Superman"
(b) "Batman Vs. Ra's Al Ghul"
(c) "Best of DC" Volume 1
(d) "Superman Vs. Wonder Woman"
(e) "Superman Vs. Shazam"
(f) "Superboy and the Legion of S.H." (C-55)

MARVEL

HOWARD THE DUCK; 22, 23

STAR WARS; 6 and 7

"UNKNOWN WORLDS OF SCIENCE FICTION"; 1-7

MARVEL PREVIEW; featuring "Star-Lord"

CHARLTON

DOOMSDAY + 1; 3

SPACE 1999; 1 onwards

MISCELLANEOUS:-

1. SHADOW Belmont paperbacks

2. Belmont's; "Return of the Shadow"

3. SHADOW, DOC SAVAGE, and AVENGER pulps and UK reprints

4. TV CENTURY 21 toys, games, records, comics, annuals, photographs, etc

5. "THUNDERBIRDS ARE GO!", movie tie-in.

6. COUNTDOWN, UFO, and THUNDERBIRDS Holiday Specials

7. UFO and THUNDERBIRDS 1970's annuals

8. MAN FROM U.N.C.L.E. UK and US paperbacks and monthly magazines

9. MONKEES annuals, comics, records etc

10. ZIGZAG 19 and 40

11. "LOOK-IN"; Number 38 (13th September 1975) to Number 21 (20th May 1978). ALL must be in at least Near Mint condition. I will pay 10p per issue

Dave Harwood Yes, I certainly was amazed.

It's a funny thing, y'know, but despite having the longest letter in Bem-20, as well as part II of my other one in FT (I guess I'm flattered, youse guys), I still felt a little left out. I actually missed Mike's interruptions. /(Aw Dave, you are such a sweetie. But my silences usually denote agreement with what you're saying.)/ No, really, I mean it. It's good to get printed, but it is even better to get feedback in the next issue's lettercol, either pro or con. This doesn't always happen, but Mike's "instant feedback" is a more than acceptable substitute.

It has the disadvantage of course that the more space Mike takes up, the less room you have to actually print letters. However, if some of the increased page count is handed over to Reaction, neither aspect need suffer. It'll be interesting to see how you use the space, Martin.

Bem-20 was a somewhat unusual package; as a one-off (for a justifiable celebratory issue) it was a nice idea; I wouldn't want it to become a habit, though. In principle I'm all in favour of fan strips (it would be hypocritical if I wasn't, since my one and only foray into fanzine publishing was basically a strip-zine); in practise, however, I have seen few that impressed me. But then, I'm a lot harder to please these days.

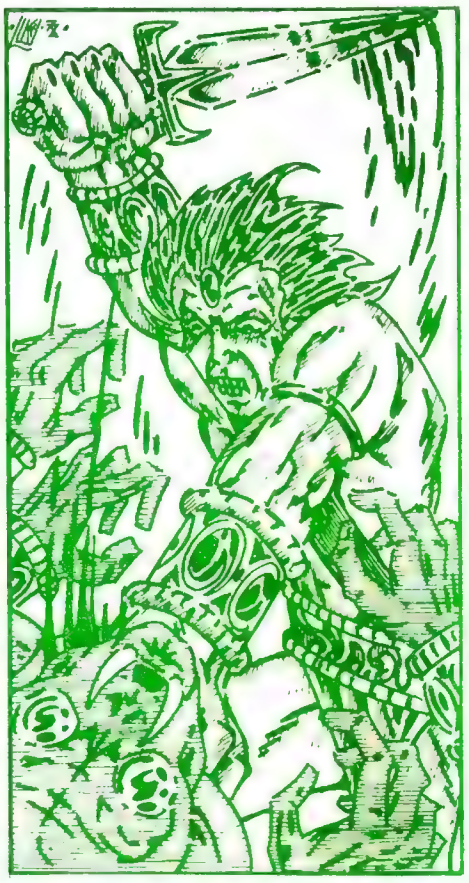
In effect I applaud the fact that you allowed Chris to strut his stuff for 15 pages; I just wasn't knocked out by the result. There is no doubt that Chris can draw when he wants to, though his rather blocky inking grates on me at times, and his scripting is generally good. In this instance there were times when the art looked a little sloppy (rushed?) and in places quite (deliberately?) ugly. I'm possibly only really happy with Chris' studied semi-grotesque drawing style in small doses.

But mainly I just don't like Captain Frog. /(I must admit, I glanced at Captain Frog, and thought it would be an ordeal to read, because Chris' art looks so unattractive, and also because of the abysmal tradition of fan scripting. So, I read the rest of Bem and FT, then read CF...and loved it. The plot was very good, script much more than adequate, and the art, though obviously very stylised, was very good indeed. Yes, it has a slightly sketchy look, but I'm sure that's completely deliberate, and not the result of any rush.)/

Also, since I buy Bem primarily for the written contributions, I think my disapointment at the necessary cut-back on these features probably influenced my feelings towards the strip. That's why, if Bem proper must suffer every time, I'm not too keen about similar excursions in future--I like Thundermole even less than ol' Froggy.

The DC news was something of a shocker; with other recent cancellations, over a third of the titles I regularly buy have suddenly been given the chop, including three particular favourites, while the remainder go up in price. That is hardly the best news I've ever heard. If this new distribution system which cuts back on over-production works, does that mean there'll be fewer 'left-overs' to be shipped over to Britain? /(I shouldn't think so, as most of our ration is specially printed, with a British price on the cover, these days. -ML)/

The Eagle Awards didn't cheer me up much either (congrats by the way, [a]gain), but then I didn't expect them to. I thought Neal Adams being (again) voted favourite artist was rather inequitable, not because I don't admire his work, but because I'd accepted that the awards were for work that appeared in 1977. All Adams did in that time were a few covers--the Superman/Ali book appearing this January--which seems to be a dubious basis for the number of the votes he received. Since the only value of such awards is in granting a little ego-boost to the people who have most entertained us over the year, then surely it is more just that they should go to the folk who have put in sufficient hard graft to earn such an accolade, rather than fly-by-night prima donnas like Adams (and no, I'm



not a Socialist). I like Adams, very much in fact, and will be more than happy if the Supes/Ali book is voted best comic of '78, but he did damn all in '77 to deserve top placing.

I don't agree with most of the other results either but, sour grapes aside, I have to wonder how Marvel continue to retain their mass popularity. I think availability must be part of the answer; for several years now distribution of DCs has ranged from abysmal to nonexistent, while Marvels have been coming over pretty consistently. The UK b & w reprints (which I detest) probably helped their popularity too, as well as serving to recruit new 'Marvelites'.

Again, Marvel have, until recently, been much more deliberate than DC in their attempts to woo fandom and the older reader in general. Personally I was never greatly impressed by the Stan Lee-type hyperbole, or the rather self-conscious "chummy" atmosphere the letters and bullpen pages tried to engender; it must work on some people though, otherwise they wouldn't do it.

Have Marvel really done more for 'the fan' over the years? Do they really have more respect for the intelligence of their readers? The question fascinates me, because I honestly don't believe Marvel are as superior as the Eagle Awards might suggest. Perhaps the answer lies not in the actual comics but in me, and whatever it is I look for in them. Or maybe that's the same thing.

I'm glad Reaction survived the cut-back on written contributions, since it is my favourite feature and usually provides several topics worthy of comment, as it should.

I'm not sure I entirely agree with your rather bald statement of some time back, Mike, to the effect that if the writing in apas was sufficiently interesting then the regular fanzines would willingly take it. Is it not possible, or even likely, that there are more writers in fandom, with more things to say, than the ordinary 'zines can cope with? Also most fanzines have a fixed 'staff' of regular contributors, which cuts down even more on the space that is available for 'outsiders'.

In the past, anyone who felt he had something to offer (literary or artistic) but was unable to find enough of an outlet for his work only had one recourse: produce his own fanzine --if he could afford it. That's what I did and, to a degree, so did you, Mike. Now he can join, or even start, an apa instead, which must be easier on the pocket.

Strange, defending something you know damn all about; for all I know apas may indeed be no more than a "clipped-together bunch of letters". /(Yes, upon reflection I must admit that apas are worthwhile in their donation of writing and subject opportunity. As you infer, I produced Sector 1 largely through frustration over the lack of possible outlets for my material (when you gotta write..). I also became involved in a free 'n' easy apa-type genzine called Qwertyioup, for which I wrote about such diverse subjects as God and underpants. But, from the apas I saw, the whole value lay in the writing output; think of a subject from the top of your head and write as much as possible about it. There seemed to be little academic or intellectual control, though this will undoubtedly evolve; the light-hearted, slight, fun found in most British apa contributions contrasts strongly with the U.S. apazines I've seen, which consist of well thought-out and written humour pieces or heavyweight articles on subjects too specific or unrelated to appear in a conventional 'zine.)/

I must admit I wasn't overly impressed by the Hulk TV show, though if one's to believe LWT it was a "smash-hit" (rotten pun) with the viewers. I prefer Wonder Woman, even though it is about as intellectually stimulating as 'Crossroads'. The reason is that it doesn't try to deny its comic-book origins; indeed, it capitalises on them, unlike the Hulk with its pretensions to seriousness. Besides, Lynda Carter is a lot nicer to look at than Lou Ferrigno--now she is stimulating, but to a different part of the anatomy from the head! The choice of this rather--ah--"well-developed" lady to play the Amazon is especially intriguing in the light of all those old comments about WW being flat-chested. Male chauvinism rides again. /(Purely a matter of taste. I find the comics campy style embarrassing to the extreme on TV. I agree with the decision of the Hulk's producers to emphasize the drama and impact of the characters--now if only they could capture his pathos, without making it a soap-opera.)/

Hope you had a good Con. I missed it on purpose -- they're much too crowded and hectic for my tastes. I prefer the Marts, especially now that attendance seems to have dropped. /(This year's con was easily the best I've attended, partially because we had some actual Americans there, but also because of the coffee lounge, which allowed for ease of conversation in a relaxed (though expensive --25p for coffee) atmosphere. This must be a must for next year's con.)/

Andy Brewer Eagle Awards first--what else? Let's see, Adams, Englehart, the Avengers Annual, 2-in-1, CMN... Was there ever any doubt about these winning? I am surprised about how low House/Halls of Hammer/Horror came, though; come on now, it's better than 2000 A.D. After reading Starlord I take some of what I said back, but not all. 2000 A.D. isn't very good; okay, it's not bad compared to Valiant, Battle, etc but it still isn't as good as the (I won't say worst) less good American comics. Starlord is better, but even there some of the dialogue is pretty trite. What I will say though is that, even with its faults, Starlord is the best British comic for a long time. I'm not counting HoH -- is it a comic? /(Mais non, it's a magazine; it's got so many words.)/

Marshall Rogers ran away with the new artist category? I still prefer Nasser. /(Rogers has offered something original, Nasser is doing a 1970 Adams impersonation.)/

Going back to HoH, didn't Adams do badly; virtually nobody seemed to like him, should we think again? Is Neal Adams God, or are we a tiny bit conditioned into saying so? The fact is that people who had never seen his work before were not at all impressed --I'm not an Adams-hater, but I think even Neal's fans could see that horror stories are not his forte. Could you imagine Wrightson doing Superman? No one illustrates horror better than Wrightson, but I doubt if he could do a superhero strip. Similarly very few people come near Adams in superhero drawing, but he can't hold the same position when he moves into horror. Stick to your own field, Neal! /(I've been trying to visualise the various 'horror' tales Adams did for DC, Marvel and Warren, and, as far as my far-from-faultless memory serves me, none of them were the "mood" horror that Wrightson excels in, more the conventional adventure story with a twist. Contrasting with Adams' limitations (strong on super-hero; weak on horror) is Kirby, whose art and pacing is excellent in both. His horror is not very subtle, but it's very effective--see the Bucky Barnes nightmare sequence in Captain America #107.)/

Kathleen, how can anybody dislike the Wolverine. The fact that he may be a psycho is what makes him such an interesting character, by far the best creation to come from Marvel for some time. I mean, Wolvie is the only hero who is well & truly nasty, to say the least. Hawkeye was pretty annoying, Green Arrow's the same (coincidence?), but Wolverine is a right bastard. I also wish Marvel would get the relative strengths of their characters sorted out. Wolvie quite easily held his own against the Hulk, he nearly killed the Wendigo, and next they have him clobbered by Iron Fist, and nearly all the X-Men!

I agree with John Dakin about some of the dealers at marts, and comic shops all around; a lot of people are getting ripped off. I've seen the first KISS comic going for £7.50. I wouldn't mind if it was a good comic, but it was crap. I mean, printing with blood in it, what next?

Anyway, even though this issue was short, not counting the free Captain Frog (sorry, but no thanks), Bem's still great value (creep creep).

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WRITE FOR FREE COMIC-SF LIST.

Dick Domar I once sold GL #76 for £17.50 (pristine mint US copy) through the post, and was I happy. It helped pay £30 I spent on Spidey 2 in mint. Prices vary between dealers. This is called competition. /(And so the endless debate about high prices endlessly continues. I suppose it eventually boils down to a market situation of too many collectors chasing scarce items like GL #76, and those foolish enough to part with vast sums of money allowing prices to spiral. Perhaps it only takes one dealer to sell GL #76 at £17 for the rest of us to immediately conclude that that is the fair asking price for the comic. Such price-hiking is still sickeningly unscrupulous, as far as I'm concerned, and it's the height of moral hypocrisy to try to defend it. "Competition" for what? To see who can become the greediest dealer?)/ John Dakin says he doesn't go near some dealers at marts because of their prices. I don't blame him, but it does show small-mindedness. Even the highest-priced dealer can be talked to, and it's no skin off your nose to ask and plead with a dealer to reduce the price for you. /(What a charming picture of Joe Fan, begging and pleading round dealers' tables. You call John's attitude small-mindedness; I'd call it pride, coupled with common sense.)/

I was always impressed with sob stories, and made many reductions, even though I was one of the cheapest dealers at marts. If you rely on the "cheap dealers", you may not get those issues you need -- comics, the rarer ones in particular, are worth what you're prepared to pay. I was prepared to pay £10 for Spider-Man 18 but I got it for £4 from one of your so-called dealers to keep away from, and that was without a red-uction. /(Is it such a difficult choice, between buying your heart's desire now and spending a fortune on it, or waiting a while to get it at half or a quarter of the price that certain dealers are asking?)/

I've published my last list now, and attended my last mart as a dealer --that's so I can devote more time to reading and getting more involved in the fan side of comicdom. After 5 years of dealing I need a rest. If you were one of the people who bought off me, I would like to thank you for your support, and wish you happy collecting for the future.

Graeme Bassett In FT 30 I posed the earth-shaking question, "Why do some adaptations use the likenesses of stars and others not", a question which brought an answer winging back from Steve Noble, directing me to peruse the editorial in the CE3K Super Special which, apart from telling us this was standard practise, left us as uninformed as before, though Steve did venture to suggest that it was due to the temperamental nature of stars...that grand old dame of the theatre Farrah Fawcett Majors to name but one. With all due respect I can't accept this explanation since it asks me to believe that the producers give one single screw about Marvel comics, and if this was true surely Goodwin and Simonson wouldn't have had to labour under such frustrating conditions in adapting the movie. My own pet theory returns to the Star mentality again, my reasons being the wounded puppy-dog look on little David Soul's face when he found out he couldn't copyright his face in England, and would get nowt from all those Darling David "tributes" floating around the newsagents, an affair which led me to presume that through the magic of bent lawyers and the American legal system people can copyright their faces... Why not? Bing Crosby once had another singer thrown off some radio commercials because their voices were too similar.

But then, I wonder how many artists breathe a sigh of relief when they learn they don't have to draw likenesses? As Dave Harwood says, comic art is shorthand and while it looks acceptable in context, to place real faces in the middle of Marvel's stylised figures creates a ludicrous and ugly smash-up worthy of a fog-bound M1 (the Rutland "Beast" story for example). I suppose it just goes to show once more another difference between British and foreign art, or even British and British art. Martin Asbury's Steve Austin never ceases to fascinate me for the way he'll draw his own version of Austin right through the strip, and then throw in a very good likeness of Lee Majors; you get the idea that Asbury would rather stick to shorthand, since tricky layouts and graphics are his strength, but you can't really criticise anyone who managed to work in the moustache that Majors decided to grow in mid-adventure. John Bolton, on the other hand, draws such natural faces anyway that the likenesses merge with the rest of the strip quite naturally--not that I'm saying it's easy to draw likenesses.

Steve Noble...you may not see Don McGregor or Steve Gerber bothering with an adaptation...then again you may not have seen them bothering with JUNGLE ACTION or TALES OF THE ZOMBIE much lately, and you may not have seen McGregor's "The Pit And The Pendulum". /(That's MARVEL CLASSICS COMICS #28 -- he also did script and design for #23, "The Moonstone", and #31, "First Men In The Moon". -ML)/

There's no difference between Gerber taking on such a comic as CAPTAIN AMERICA and taking on a format such as "The Sweeney", except that Gerber is unfamiliar with England and would probably make a right cock-up of it.

Frank Robbins can draw. Nyahh.

But, how can I disappoint John Foster of Leeds? On to the serious stuff. I'm in complete agreement with you about Wolverine, one of my favourite characters at the moment, because as you showed there's some depth to his character, more than his comrades...and yet at the same time he's more entertaining than his fellow mutants. Perhaps the two go hand in hand...Wolverine, being such a lively character, creates his own humour, without any work on Chris Claremont's part, whilst the others, being a clutch of clichés, tend to spawn laboured time-wasting "humour" --Nightcrawler's Mike Yarwood spot in Banshee's castle for instance.

Perhaps I'm being a bit too harsh. Storm and Jeannie have some interesting points, but since we know Storm will get over her claustrophobia the same way Wonder Man conquered his self-doubts, she'll become as boring as the human elf, Ironsides and old Begorrah and Bejabbers, who for all our sakes should get back to Blackhawk Island before they're missed. Cyclops is interesting as a kind of stoic version of Wolvy, but to tell the truth I'm getting a bit sick of him, perhaps making him the most realistic of all. However, I agreed with what you said about Wolvy. Isn't it a pity they couldn't fit him into the Incredible Hulk TV series...the most Incredible episodes of which have been, so far, the one using all the chase scenes from DUEL and the episode with Greenskin running thru an unconcerned Times Square. "Oh look, there's a green-skinned man." It really showed up all those HULK comics depicting traffic jams and the National Guard, and General Ross herding Banner's alter-ego into the Subway. Bixby's pretty good as Banner but I really think they should have made it in the mini-series format, because then they could have established some continuity. Banner could stay the Hulk for longer, get some better plots, and the armed forces could gradually become aware of the Hulk's existence; of course, Banner would have to be killed in the last episode, but at least there'd be a last episode, and not just a fade-out with no renewal.

BLAKE'S SEVEN? Despite the cheap special effects the series had good scripts and good actors. /(I agree about the cheap special effects, but good scripts and actors? I can only conclude you were watching a Grimsby Special version.)/ In the human sense it was good, despite some traces of --pastiche? Avon as Spock, Vila as Bones, Blake as McCoy... thank God Avon was out for his own skin, and Blake was ultra innocent; there were traces of what had gone before, but they weren't as blatant as STAR WARS.

BY PHILIP MORTON
GLEITZMAN
GHOD! COMMUTING... AS IF I'M NOT KNACKERED ENOUGH WORKING FOR RED ADAIR(U.K.) LTD., I HAVE TO DO BATTLE WITH BRITISH RAIL TWICE DAILY.
©1978 BY
PHILIP MO
↙ UNDER
← TICKE
← PEDER
WELL, HEL-LO! FANCY MEETING YOU HERE!
EEEK!
NO, NO. YOU'RE RIGHT. YOU'VE NEVER SEEN ME BEFORE. I'M NIK GLEITZMAN AND I JUST THOUGHT I'D GET OUR RELATIONSHIP OFF TO A NICE SHAKY START...
...WHENCE IT MAY MORE EASILY DETERIORATE INTO THE MESS I USUALLY MAKE OF THINGS.
?
OH... COME TO THINK OF IT... WHAT'S THE POINT? GOODBYE. HAVE A LOVELY LIFE.

Nige Squires David C. Wishart was right about the criticism that will come in the direction of the tele-movie; here's some, for a start.

The portrayal of the Hulk was feeble, and his physical appearance left a lot to be desired. /(Surely the Hulk's visual appearance is the series' undeniable strong point.)/ The filming techniques used, in my opinion, did not enhance the treatment of the Hulk, but merely made it all the more laughable. Let's face it, comics do not lend themselves to TV (and vice-versa); the two artforms are irreconcilable. /(On the face of it, comics and films, including TV films, shouldn't be irreconcilable, both dealing primarily in images, or in a blend of words and pictures. The obvious banality of comics on TV is due largely to the attempts to give juvenile material (like Wonder Woman or Batman) serious quasi-adult treatment. The producers of The Hulk have made a commendable attempt to overcome the possibly ridiculous aspect of a large green man by making him suitably fearsome. The Hulk succeeds on the usual rubbish American TV drama level, and does the prestige of comics more good than harm; at least they're not being laughed at this time.)/

However, I do agree that the rather loosely-based story was quite good, taking into account the fact that the original Marvel plot and its demands are not very TV-orientated. Having said that though, I feel that the TV movie and subsequent series is a bad thing; the production of such series is a case of blatant commercialism, and they are aimed at the hordes of mindless children who don't know any better than to watch them.

Chris Ash Would you mind if I took your printer out somewhere nice, quiet, and out of the way...and shot him? Every plate of the Captain Frog story, except for the last page, was hideously over-exposed, resulting in drastic loss of detail and several tonal areas reproducing as solid blue --the only other exception was the red overlay on the front and back cover, which was under-exposed, thereby erasing the flesh tones from the top half of the images. Yes it's Graphic Sense and The Comic Review for me from now on. Do you hear me, Martin? We're through, you and I!! Zilch, Kaput, Finito!!!

On a lighter note, I'd just like to say how much I enjoyed the centre-spread of Fantasy Trader, and also Superswipe's little picture of me on the sensible bit. Ah well, Bem will be all sensible next issue. Circulation will start to recover. The mists of autumn will close in around Bem 20. The French students will all have returned home. Gez Kelly will have learned how to spell. Kathleen Glancy will have learned how to... Whoops! Look at the time--I've just remembered I've got to go to a job interview, and it's a long way to the Vatican. Pax Vobiscum gang. /(But Chris, Martin's got this great idea for next year's special; some character called...er...Captain Britain?)/

Russ Nicholson In the Bem Ballot given out with Bem 19, one question was about which strip in Bem was preferred, and I wrote "none at present" --but that was before I saw the Captain Frog comic. Here is a strip worthy of praise--obviously where it should be, on its own -- complete. A good first effort; forget Thundermole, and let's have more of Captain Frog and friends. Lovely.

It's sad to note that STARLORD has been shelved -- surely before a true sales value could be assessed -- and sadder still to see in the Eagle Awards how many people passed on the British publication, artist, writer and character sections, rather than vote for one of the nominees. True, they may not have been everyone's choice--but if polls are to have any effect, particularly in Britain, we cannot afford to waste votes, yet this is what has happened.

Still on the subject of the Eagle Awards, all praise to John Bolton, but what a crime to see Brian Lewis come fourth in a list which although praiseworthy cannot match him in draughtmanship, layout & especially colour work, and it's just as criminal that talent such as John Burns, Paul Neary, and even Barry Smith (he is British, after all) did not even make it onto a list that reads like a HoH/2000 A.D. artists roster.

Suhail Akhtar The news on the cover of Bem-20 was really quite shocking. I had hoped that the new 50 cent format would have been successful enough to force Marvel to follow. Apparently, we're seeing a repeat of a few years ago with the failure of the 25c/48 page format. The thing that really emphasized DC's failure was the cancellation of almost half their line.

It's a fact that DC have recently been slipping from the peak they attained only a short time ago; this defeat puts them back to the position two years ago. Even Les Chester must be speechless now! /(Fat chance.)/

Oh yes, I really enjoyed Captain Frog, although the idea of Thundermole as the star of another special issue is going a little bit too far.

Phil Greenaway Well, it must have taken a helluva lot of nerve to publish the Captain Frog comic -- which, as was I suppose the intention, succeeded in pleasantly surprising me. I must say that Chris Ash's strip was highly amusing as well as being well drawn and progressing at a brisk pace; I'll be honest and say that Captain Frog isn't usually one of my favourite features in Bem, disliking its abruptness, but somehow the strip seemed to work in the increased number of pages it had this time.

At present, a lot of fan editors seem to prefer publishing 'amateur' comic strips...it's to be encouraged as the future of mainstream comics (Marvel and DC), with their ever-spiralling prices, is suspect to say the least. They could just collapse. Perhaps I'm being overly pessimistic --there'll always be comics in one form or another -- it's just that DC and Marvel will have to find an acceptable and commercial format to utilise for their products if they are to survive. In the meantime, I think that it would be advisable to have as many alternatives on the market as possible.

On a lighter note, I attended the Comicon this year. Apart from buying MARVEL PREMIERE #1 off Rob Barrow for £3 (a reasonable price, according to a friend) and then seeing a similar copy on the next table for £2, I had a great time...nearly everyone there was extremely friendly, including George Pérez, Brian Lewis, Bob Monkhouse (gasp!) and Don McGregor. Pity Don was a little self-indulgent with his speech. /(In what way?)/ Oh, and what was the mystery event? I missed it because I was too busy associating (?) with friends, etc. /(D'you know, Martin?)/ /(Nope, the mystery event remains a mystery to me, Mike! -ML)/

PS: I did NOT write that review of Bem in The Comic Review.

Bill Morris I don't know how anybody else feels about the Roll of Honour Eagle Award going to Steve Englehart, but I know it makes me mad. It's an insult to men like Jack Kirby (while I agree he's not at his best at the moment), Will Eisner & Jim Steranko who have created more classic comics than Englehart ever could, even if he carried on writing for the next five years.

Okay, Englehart has written some fine issues of DETECTIVE COMICS and THE AVENGERS, though I still remember the fill-ins and reprints on that comic, but it takes more than this to be immortalised as a comic great. What about Ditko, Infantino, Gardner Fox, Kane, Broome, etc? Compared to those men Englehart's pedigree pales into insignificance.

I feel the blame for this injustice rests with COMIC MEDIA NEWS, who have been bumming Englehart up with every issue they bring out. My criticism in no way reflects on Steve Englehart's ability to write comics; I admire his style. It's just that his achievements do not warrant this award.

Bob Watkins It was nice to see some extra interest generated by having sub-headlines on the cover. Overall though Bem is lacking punch; I can't put my finger on it, but Bem is becoming almost conservative in its approach. More newsworthy news is required. Yes, I know, no news must be good news. I doubt if anyone really believes that, unless a born pessimist. /(Pessimism well founded when the news is of a savage cutback, and I'd say that was certainly a newsworthy item. But perhaps the return of Reg Uspatoff, and his comments on the news, would add the extra "punch" you desire.)/

Barry K. Winetrobe First of all, let me say that what I said about Don McGregor and his worshipping fans in my last letter was borne out at the London comicon. Mr Cruden, you rightly predicted that his reception would be "quite adulatory". He was a very nice, very sincere gentleman, obviously an embittered innocent in the harsh commercial reality that is Marvel comics. Everybody at the con was behind him 100%, and treated Vohland & Salicrup as anti-McGregor Marvel hatchetmen. (Well, perhaps not as strongly as that, but Duffy's replies to Don's charges were hardly received with total sympathy.) /(At least Jim Salicrup seemed conscious of, and apologetic about, the fact that the situation at Marvel isn't as cosy as it might be. Vohland seemed to adopt an arrogant 'so what' attitude about the whole business.)/

However, my point about his skill still stands. You say Don is praiseworthy for "sheer good writing" and on the same page Andy Brewer calls the McGregor/Russell KILLRAVENs "The finest thing ever to come out of comics...higher than Eisner's Spirit ..." Well, I could challenge that last claim if Andy wishes, but not here. /(Why ever not?)/

I still maintain that Don's output (however bowdlerised by editorial staff), as it stands, is not worthy of the sheer intensity of praise it receives. What it does show is that Don has massive creative potential, but I doubt that the comics format will allow him much scope to improve and mature. Perhaps he should become a straight novelist, or poet -- the SABRE book should be a good trial for him. What would be interesting would be a book or article by Don detailing fully his experiences and frustrations at Marvel. Genuine "behind-the-scenes" pieces are always fascinating, and that one would be a beauty. /(I think Don's revelations about Marvel and its staff have gone as far as they can, considering Don still wants to work for Marvel.)/

By the way, Bem-20 proper and the Captain Frog comic were both excellent; I especially liked the issue's Fan-Things. Judging by Bem's Eagle Awards list, your readership seems to be a more mature and discriminating bunch than fandom in general -- see categories 3, 4, 14, 17 (naturally) and 21.

Kill!

KILL THEM!... OBLIT ALL OF THEM!

THE MUTANT MASTER YELLS AT THE PILOT OF THE NEURAL CRUISER.

NO SURVIVORS... KILL THEM ALL... TRAK!

THE ROBOT DETECTIVE

SPENCER TRAK

POLITICS IN THE ORCOSMIC UNIVERSE REQUIRED ALL MEN OF SUBSTANCE TO EMPLOY THEIR OWN ROBOT DETECTIVES. THESE MACHINES WERE LOGICAL GATHERERS OF INFORMATION AND EFFICIENT ASSASSINS. IN A WORLD OF MUTANT HUMANOIDS THE ROBOTS HELD THE KEY TO LIFE AND DEATH.
THEY WERE SUPPOSED TO BE DEVOID OF EMOTIONS BUT SOME OF THEM WERE SO COMPLEX THAT NOW EVEN THEIR MASTERS WERE UNSURE OF THEIR INTENTIONS...

THE NEURAL CRUISER TURNS IT'S FULL FIRE POWER TOWARDS THE MINUTE CELL SHIP... AND THE ROBOT PILOT'S FINGER REACHES OUT FOR THE FIRING BUTTON...

I CANNOT KILL A SHIP FULL OF HUMANOIDS JUST TO OBLIT ONE MAN... SIR!

YOU WILL!... YOU ARE PROGRAMMED TO DEFEND ME AGAINST MY RIVALS AND NOW I CAN ACHIEVE ALL MY AMBITIONS WITH THE DESTRUCTION OF ECAP AND THAT DEVIL THAT HE CALLS A DAUGHTER!

BUT THEY HAVE TOO MANY INNOCENT HUMANS WITH THEM... MUTANTS LIKE YOURSELF... NOT MACHINES LIKE ME!... I CANNOT FIRE... MUST NOT... MUST OVERIDE ORDER!...

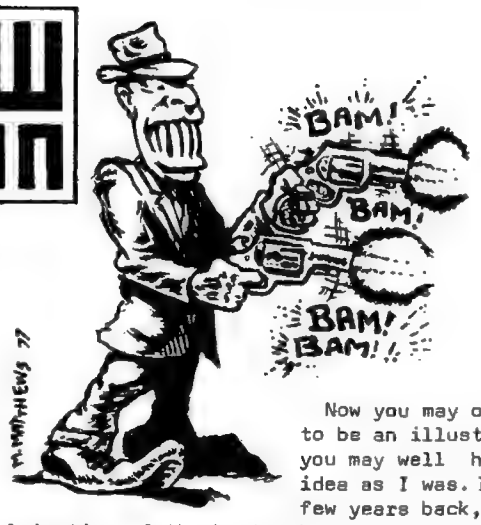
THE STRUGGLE IN THE ROBOT'S BRAIN WAS CAUSING ALL OTHER ACTIONS TO BE TERMINATED. HE BRUSHED ASIDE ALL LINKS WITH THE SHIP... RIPPING OUT THE DELICATE LINKING NODES TO HIS SUPER ACTIVE BRAIN BANKS.
HIS HAND REACHED INSIDE HIS JACKET TO THE MAIN LINKS OF HIS BEING...

YOU WILL NOT ORDER ME AGAIN... SIR!

NEXT: THE FABULOUS DEE COMPOZE!

BUBBLEN COMICS

REVIEW SECTION



FANTASTIC FOUR #200
"When Titans Clash"
by Marv Wolfman, Keith Pollard & Joe Sinnott

Marvel intended this to be a double-sized anniversary treat, and put in all the right ingredients --none of that nonsense of "every old villain at once" milestone issues, instead we are given the culmination of the best Doc Doom multi-parter for years, and an ending that is actually original, the first real jolter in this book since Franklin blew his mind in FF 141. While the first threequarters of the book display the same faults as the previous few issues, an attempt at old-fashioned Lee-type simple scripting which doesn't come off, due to heavyhanded dialogue, the last few pages are as good as anything in the last few years of FF. Doc Doom is Marvel's Joker, by far the best supervillain around, who when properly exploited provides some of Marvel's all-time classics ("The Battle of the Baxter Building" and "The Peril and the Power").

Without doubt, this will be a very popular issue with readers, and on the whole I'd give it a plus. What's important is what Marv, and Keith and Joe, do in #201 and future issues. -Barry K. Winetrobe

MODESTY BLAISE: IN THE BEGINNING Star: 70p
"La Machine" (70 pages) and "The Long Lever" (59 pages) by Peter O'Donnell & Jim Holdaway

One of the problems with collecting newspaper strips is the fact that you've got to continually cut them out and paste them into a scrapbook. Now an enterprising publisher has partly solved that problem by reprinting "the first two complete cartoon adventures of Modesty Blaise". To quote the preface: "Comprising the first two adventures of the incomparable Modesty Blaise, taking her through the cut-throat Paris underworld to the corrupt luxury of a millionaire's yacht to the death-traps of a tropical jungle." I couldn't have summed it up better myself.

Remembering the limitations of a daily newspaper strip and the restrictions imposed by the format, O'Donnell's writing is seen to be highly literate, putting across an effective story with a definite sense of direction and clearly portrayed characters. The art also matches up to the best American artists...figures being anatomically perfect and complemented by detailed backgrounds. The lettering is a little obscure in some places, and is a bit "heavy" on the one enlarged panel of each page; but even with the poor reproduction in this book the art still shines through.

At 70p this book compares favourably with the normal comics and magazines that we are familiar with in terms of value for money and quality of content; try it--I think you'll like it.

-Phil Greenaway

BATMAN SPECTACULAR 1978 (DC SPECIAL SERIES 15)
"Hang the Batman" by Reed, Nasser & Rubinstein (30 pages); "I Now Pronounce You Batman and Wife" by O'Neil, Golden & Giordano (20 pages); "Death Strikes at Midnight and Three" by O'Neil & Rogers (15 pages)

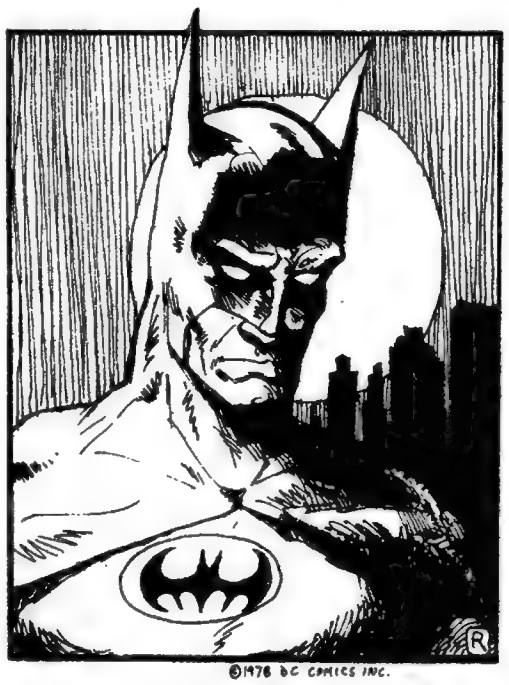
I had given up writing reviews, actually--one reason was that so many people said "You only slag comics, you never say anything nice...don't you like anything?" It's not true, actually; I have praised things where I thought they warranted it, just as I've been vitriolic where I thought that was warranted. But it seems that only the acid is remembered; the sugar dissolves and gets forgotten. (How's that for imagery? Don McG, eat your heart out...) That being so, this review will soon be forgotten.

I didn't buy the Batman Spectacular because it was a spectacular or because it was Batman, but merely because it was a DC comic, and I buy all DC & Marvel comics. Obviously the drawback to this is that I end up reading stuff like Human Fly (eventually), but the advantage that for me outweighs that is that I don't miss things like this.

The first story sounded hokey, and was. It was also bloody well written, and excellently drawn. The second sounded excruciating --it wasn't. Again it was well written, and again it was superbly drawn. Which leaves "Death Strikes at Midnight and Three".

Now you may or may not have known that this was to be an illustrated text story, but if you did you may well have been as underwhelmed at the idea as I was. I remember another such project a few years back, also by Denny O'Neil: it wasn't bad, but it was pointless -- it could have been told in the normal way with just a few more captions than usual. So I didn't think much to the prospect of this thing. But then I read it.

I think what staggered me as much as anything was that it worked. It wasn't like an ordinary comic story where you get the words and pictures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simultaneously, it was more subliminal, if you can follow what I mean. As you read the story, your eyes skim past the pictures around and between the words... Some pages worked a lot better than others, mind, but overall it was very effective.

Oh, and the story was beautifully written -- I ought to mention that, really. Denny is one of these people who can write very well, when they are sufficiently interested in a thing. Would that it happened more often. Plus, of course, the art was by Marshall Rogers, about whom I should not need to tell you anything, right?

So what are you waiting for? For me to call it a masterpiece? Well of course it was. Now go out and buy it, already... If you don't buy it now, in years to come you'll find that the price will be astronomical--and it'll still be worth it. -KW

DRAGONFLAME & Other Bedtime Nightmares
by Don McGregor, illustrated by Paul Gulacy; Fictioneer Books Ltd, Lakemont, Georgia. 1978

Beautiful! That's the first descriptive word that comes into my mind, but it isn't easy to explain why...what is Don McGregor saying? He's showing all the readers of Dragonflame a different facet of life with each story; stories of love, fantasy, science fiction, and those like "Dragonflame" which puts a man into the position of a hero on a par with the heroes through the ages. Not with the superheroes of comics, but with the ordinary people who find there is a hero inside them, another person in fact who they knew nothing of until his being surfaced. Not as "a knight in shining armour", not as a superman, but as a man who has been pushed so far that there is no longer any room for passiveness. He has to fight back.

A gentler story is "The Real World Is Outside Waiting"; it's set on Staten Island ferry, and the words of Don McGregor flow along with the water, there is a poignant quality to some parts of the story. A feeling of a "time lost". This quality shows even more in "The Play It Again Sam Casablanca Blues".

Perhaps on a more intimate level, each story is a small piece of Don McGregor's own life, reflecting on life as a whole. However, every person who reads this book will form their own ideas on it, to everyone it will give a different message. So I advise all of you to get hold of a copy as soon as you can -- you'll enjoy the experience. -Maureen James

DAREDEVIL #153 (July)
"Betrayal" by McKenzie, Colan & DeZuniga

Scarcely anything is more integral to present-day superheroics than the fight scene. It was chiefly the prominence of fight scenes, along with character development, that distinguished 'sixties Marvel comics from 'sixties National. That prominence must have played a large part in making Marvel the bigger company, for the level of violence in DC comics has risen dramatically, as if it had to for DC to compete. Nevertheless, most fan writing has ignored the fight scene--not so much, I imagine, from shame at its silly unrealism, as because it's much easier to discuss plot. Partly as compensation for fandom's neglect I'd like to discuss one fight scene in terms of how artist Gene Colan has modelled it: the fight scene that takes up all of Daredevil #153.

The splash page shows Daredevil breaking a window, but the excitement is diminished by pale colouring and a lot of distracting copy (including the word "betrayal" an inch tall). The next page is split up on several lines. Two panels cover reporter Ben Urich at his typewriter; Ben Urich's words (past tense) lead into panel 3, which appropriately (for an action in the past) repeats the splash page: DD breaking the window. Panel 4 shows DD again, but the continuity is disrupted by (a) the cut from DD's back (panel 3) to a front view (4); (b) the cut from DD in familiar red (3) to DD in blue (4). There is hardly any continuity from panel 4 to panel 5: long shot to close-up, blue to red, DD leaning left to leaning right.

Page 2's fragmentation contrasts sharply with page 3, one full-page panel. We get to page 3 by a cut from close-up all the way to long shot, and from slightly below Daredevil's face to a dramatic high angle; it is the largest single drawing so far, and it is necessarily the most fully integrated as a page. In consequence, it stops us sharply, inviting us to pause and reflect. The pause is dramatically perfect for the action: Daredevil's realization that Mr Hyde and the Cobra are waiting in the room for him. Thanks to the way Colan has laid out his panels, DD's stock-taking pause is ours. Additionally, this full-page panel emphasizes how important and dangerous the two villains are.

As soon as we turn the page, however, the pace becomes faster than ever. Hyde is mostly a big, black blot as he leaps for DD, page 4/panel 1 (henceforth: 4/1). Dramatically, his leg sticks way out into the next panel. He continues the dive in panel 2, drawing our attention smoothly to panel 3 and toward the actual spot on the page that he actually hits. Immediately, the Cobra jumps up and grabs Daredevil from behind.

While the characters leap and collide, this fourth page is also a complex of parallel and perpendicular lines. In the first two panels, the drawings of Hyde's body are parallel; the drawing in the third is at a right angle to both. Hyde and Daredevil's respective left legs are crossed at right angles, while their right legs are nearly parallel. DD's body and legs in panel 4 are perpendicular to Hyde's in panel 2, while the Cobra is more or less parallel. DD's arms, meanwhile, echo the "V" of his and Hyde's legs in the previous two panels. These consonant lines smooth continuity from panel to panel, thus quickening the action; but at the same time they lend a feel of gracefulness to it -- just the sort of grace that ought to characterise Daredevil.

The pace boggles, for a moment, at the top of page 6. The Cobra has Daredevil in his grip, and squeezes him unmercifully. As a sign of his power Colan has the villain covering DD's body, hiding it from view. Although the previous page had only

FORBIDDEN PLANET

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the sketchiest background, furniture here is prominent, 6/1; even more constraining, a great shadow has suddenly appeared on the wall, looming over the characters and boxing them in. The elegant parallel lines are gone. Somehow, the pressure only increases in panel 2: we see DD's agonized face in close-up, the background black.

DD breaks free by bouncing his club around the room: from the floor to the wall, to Cobra's head. Panel-to-panel continuity becomes effortlessly smooth, all of a sudden: the club ricochets in an unbroken line through panels 3, 4 and 5, restoring movement to the page just as, literally, the club restores freedom of movement to DD.

Page 7 begins with a high-angle view of Daredevil leaning over the beaten Cobra. Shadows are heavy, we can see scruff-marks on the rug, and there's a chair in the background -- all tending to slow our reading of the scene. No continuing lines connect panel 1 to panel 2, a medium shot of Hyde getting up, so the pace remains slow. However, Hyde's large face in the narrow panel and the pronounced foreshortening together warn of danger to come. Sure enough, as Hyde warms to the attack (7/3 & 4), the distracting background drops out and his flying leap makes DD double up in panel 5--out of the very window, the next page --another shocking realization; another full-page panel.

The fall, I admit, is not as gripping a sequence as it ought to have been. Roger McKenzie's thought balloons deserve much of the blame; I'll talk about them later. Even without the balloons, however, the fall would take much too long. Visually, the drunk moves <u>down</u> the page, 11/1-3, and his shattered bottle is an effective foreshadowing of DD and Hyde's apparent fate. By the time we get to panel 3, however, DD and Hyde ought to have hit the pavement themselves, already. Instead, they manage to keep on falling for two more pages!

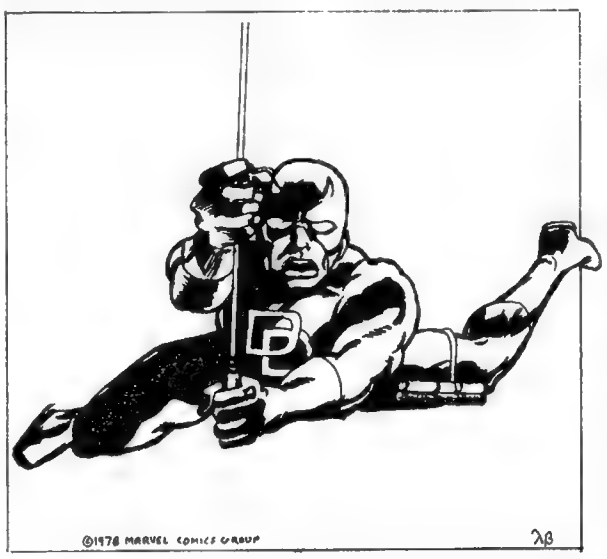
It is a nice moment, nonetheless, when DD grabs the flagpole: leisurely reaching to the left in the first panel (13/3), then suddenly reversed as he feels the wrenching pain (13/4)--his contorted free hand stabbing out at us with exaggerated foreshortening, the sky suddenly black behind him. The next panel, incidentally, shows DD's left hand impossibly low; but I don't feel anyone ought to resent the distortion. Rather, the reader ought to appreciate how well it suits the action. DD is falling, after all. By the time we go from the top of the panel to the bottom, (more precisely, from his right hand to his left) he will have fallen far enough that the left hand <u>is</u> accurately placed. (Do I stretch a point? Perhaps. But, given an equal choice between saying "This is bad art" and "on closer examination, this is good art," I think we'll enjoy ourselves more if we choose "This is good art.")

Having doubly defied the laws of gravity, Hyde follows DD to earth, 14/5. As he staggers forward for one more attack, page 19, the panel-to-panel continuity becomes much less smooth than before. We almost expect him to collapse, as he does. DD's own billy club, thrown by the Cobra, strikes him a savage blow in close-up, 20/1. Panel 2 shows DD just thinking about his spinning head, as the Cobra climbs down in the background. Befitting his agony, the perspective makes no sense -- the building across the street appears to be floating, the traffic light seems to hang from nothing. Daredevil reaches for the club, but cannot focus his "radar sense". The circles symbolizing this unfocussed sense are not concentric; in panel 4, they're not even circles any more. As the reader's eye moves thence to panel 5, it cannot avoid crossing a section of panel 6 (a non-regular pentagon) along the way. The momentary confusion this causes must reinforce the reader's sympathy for Daredevil's.

The fight scene between DD and Cobra culminates in a brutal series of close-ups, 27/3-5. The continual cutting to a new angle, the extreme foreshortening and irregular panel shapes convey a sense of Daredevil's furious energy, but also recklessness. The last panel shows a hand from nowhere ominously blocking DD's fist -- blocking it as not even a panel border had been able to, 27/4. The first panel of the next page is a close-up of the one responsible: Mr Hyde, again, who knocks Daredevil unconscious in panel 2. There's a cramped, high-angle medium shot of DD succumbing (28/3), then a low angle of Mr Hyde carrying him away. We make a transition from Hyde and Cobra carrying him into the sewer to a picture of it in the paper, on which the story ends.

Page 28 does not seem to be balanced as a whole --and none of the panels is strongly related, visually, to its neighbours. Perhaps this can be taken to show the confusedness of Ben Urich's understanding. More likely, however, it reflects DD's own complete unconsciousness. Daredevil's state of mind has determined the sense of every previous page: full stop as he realizes he's facing Mr Hyde and the Cobra (page 3); graceful ease as he dodges Hyde (4); disruption and pressure, then easy continuity as he is squeezed by the Cobra, then breaks free (6); another full stop as he flies out the window (10); swift continuity as he falls (13 & 14); distortion and confusion as his head spins (20); wild abandon as he pummels the Cobra (27). Perhaps, then, the composition very much ought to go to pieces when DD's knocked out (page 28, again).

This discussion has been framed in terms of Gene Colan's contribution largely, as I have said, to make up for the habitual neglect of the art by most fan reviewers. In any event, however, Roger McKenzie's script is quite inconsiderable. Just look at how he begins: "'Near as we can tell,' said Lt. Rose, 'the fatal confrontation began as the masked vigilante known as Daredevil



arrived at the East Side apartment of Miss Heather Glenn.'" Now, I submit that no one (especially a policeman) would actually use an expression as folksy as "near as we can tell" <u>and</u> an expression as studied and grave (not to mention pretentious) as "the masked vigilante known as Daredevil." "The East Side apartment" is uncharacteristically vague for both a police lieutenant and a newspaperman. Yet this is only poor writing; elsewhere, much worse, the writer actively interferes with the story--with the pacing of the action.

When DD flies out the window, for example, McKenzie has him thinking "Oh... my... God!" Why the dots? Why even as many as three words, let alone recognisable ones? When he's about to drop fifteen floors, I say, Daredevil should not be able to think so coherently and so leisurely. Page 11/panel 2: Colan has DD kicking Hyde away with such force that Hyde sticks out of the panel. McKenzie has DD thinking, "UNGHH--! DID IT! I'm FREE from Hyde's murderous grip... but I've still got to break my FALL... before it breaks my NECK! B-but HOW? Without my BILLY CLUB LINE, I--." By the time we've ploughed through all those words, Daredevil must have hit the ground already. Yet none of the verbiage, except (perhaps) "my BILLY CLUB LINE", is the least bit necessary -- tells us anything we don't already know. Incompetence, I say.

In respect of plotting, to conclude, DAREDEVIL #153 comprises only an ordinary superhero fight scene. Gene Colan, however, lifts it out of the ordinary by modelling the action so well. He employs smooth panel-to-panel continuity; expressive angles, composition and backgrounds; every distance from long-shot to close-up; and a vigorous, fast-moving drawing style. Most artists use similar devices. Decisively, Colan knows <u>when</u> to use them, too; eg, smooth continuity from panel to panel when the action consists of fast movement, but disjointed continuity when the hero is caught, resting, or unconscious. More than just to convey the tempo of the action, however, Colan uses these devices to give us a feel for Daredevil's <u>character</u>; eg, fighting for his life as though he were dancing, at first (page 4), but moved to such rage later on that he carelessly forgets one opponent in his fury to smash the other (page 27). It is this added dimension of human involvement that, half-consciously, draws us into the action, and makes us care what happens. It all adds up to one well-drawn comic-book fight scene. -Christopher Melchert

KAMANDI #59 (October)
"The Wondrous Western Wall" by Harris, Ayers & Bulanadi (17 pages); "The Return of Omac" by Starlin & Rubinstein (8 pages)

When reading a Starlin story, all else falls into insignificance -- and that's the case here. Even in a mere 8 pages, one gets the feeling that Starlin has big things in store for Omac -- and that in itself is a cause for excitement. Both his art and script are well up to standard.

And what of Kamandi? Well, it's an amusing story with nice art, but compared to Starlin it appears rather petty. -Marcus Boon

Well, let's be honest, Dick Ayers is not everyone's favourite artist--at least, he's not mine, but this ain't half bad. Ayers has had some pretty high-powered collaborators, in Chua and Alcala, on this book, and while Bulanadi is less well-known to me, he does quite well here. The art retains that usual flat, featureless and unimaginative style, but fortunately doesn't detract or distract from the story -- which is <u>good</u>. The latest addition to Kamandi's menagerie are 'Kangarats', but don't worry, we <u>do</u> get very close to discovering a bit more about the Great Disaster and find a mystery unfolding connected with it. Intriguing; the sort of story which actually makes you want to find out what happens next. The same can be said of the back-up feature --but of course it is by (gasp!) Jim Starlin! In 8 pages he shows that he, unlike Kirby, can actually develop as well as create mind-boggling concepts. Communication between Brother Eye and Omac has been increased to give a 'Deathlok' type situation, and while Rubinstein's finishing does not seem to fit into the Starlin style as well as, for example, Leialoha's, the art is very definitely Starlin in style and quality. Again we are about to learn a little more about the Great Disaster before "The End" appears, and it looks like that other "Great Disaster" will stop any further information. Pity; there aren't that many books that are genuinely interesting to read. And this from Bem's token Marvel fan!
-Simon Booth

TOMB OF DRACULA #67 (November)
"At Long Last--Lilith" by Marv Wolfman, Gene Colan & Tom Palmer

It's heart-rending to think this book has just six months left. It's still "the number one fear magazine" in my mind...not that there's much competition these days.

It's nice to see Lilith again, not to mention Harold H. Harold. Having Dracula powerless is quite interesting, although his strength hasn't left him. Still--buy it while you can.

It's worth it. -John Parker

THE BIONIC WOMAN ANNUAL 1979
Brown & Watson/Rainbow Books; £1.50, 64 pages

As the end of the year draws nearer, the many hundreds of different annuals begin to surface in the shops, as everything from OK to 2000 A.D. books are lapped up. This is the first annual from Brown & Watson I've seen this year and, in the tradition of last year's offering, it is rather good too.

To begin with there are three 6-page strips, drawn superbly well by Ian Gibson, which although they're very standard TV-type fare, are very slick and polished, due mainly to the flair of Gibson's artwork. There are also three 6-page text stories illustrated by Gibson, which are okay, I suppose, if you enjoy reading what is basically a comic strip in text form. The rest of the annual is taken up with photo-features, puzzles and games of the bionic variety.

Unfortunately, the price might put many people off, as the book isn't really good value -- but, when one considers that, unlike many of the IPC books the Brown & Watson annuals are always full of new material, if you could afford this one I would recommend it. -Jan Garczynski

CONAN #92 (November)
"The Thing In The Crypt" by Roy Thomas, Sal Buscema & Ernie Chan

This was the first Conan story I ever read, so it's nice to see it in colour at last, especially since it's done quite well. It's quite a simple story, which is a nice change from the rather stale regular storyline. Oh, for the good old days! -John Parker

HOWARD THE DUCK #28 (November)
"Cooking With Gas" by Marv Wolfman & Mary Skrenes, Carmine Infantino, & Frank Giacoia

Well, this issue is either:
(A) An offbeat masterpiece (like #16), an episode in the Duck's life told from an original angle, with snappy dialogue and an appropriately cartoonish style...or...
(B) A load of utter rubbish, an attempt to offload a non-story under the camouflage of HTD's reputation for zaniness, with immature scripting, and art that (in contrast to the previous Colan & Janson gems) looks like Ross Andru drawing with his toes.
I vote the latter. -Barry K. Winetrobe

LOGAN'S RUN ANNUAL 1979
Brown & Watson/Rainbow Books; £1.50, 64 pages

This annual is centered around the MGM/CBS TV series, with text stories, strips, features and quizzes. The text features centre around the characters in the show, the hovercraft, etc.
The stories in this book are enjoyable, but not over-special. Art-wise, it leaves much to be desired, and at the price you would think that the publishers could have got some better artists --even the guy who does the strip in LOOK-IN would have been better.
If you are buying any annuals this year, at least look through this one. -Stephen Bailey

AVENGERS #176 (October)
"Destiny Hunt" by Jim Shooter, David Michelinie, David Wenzel & Pablo Marcos

The story begins with a nice hunt for their enemy, and the resolution (or the answer) to the Vhiz/Whiz (Vision/Quicksilver) enmity. Although most of the characters are well-balanced in exposure, the Vision only says one line, and a certain favourite witch of mine just appears and does absolutely NOTHING. Still, some characters do dominate the plot: the villain for one, Iron Man very firmly established as the leader, and not least Moondragon and Yellowjacket, though the former is given much more exposure. In fact, all the characters seem to be fighting for an equal share of the action, which is very creditable.
I liked "The Enemy"--he has been developed in a fine way, and is by no means a cliché. Though the plot is basically just pinpointing the foe, which is all that happens in 17 pages, the story doesn't drag, and the action flows smoothly.
In a recent interview, Shooter said that he planned to streamline the Assemblers -- I don't see that it could be an improvement. At present, this book has good, consistent, authentic and dramatic direction, with graphic and vigorous art. -Z.I. Ahmad

JONAH HEX SPECTACULAR 1978 (DC S.S. 2.16)
Jonah Hex was "The Last Bounty Hunter" by Fleisher & Heath. "Bat Lash" by O'Neil & Moliterni; and Scalphunter in "Rights of Passage" by Conway, Ayers & Bulanadi

The two back-up stories are both good, but the 30-page lead story is something special--for one thing, Jonah's killed on page 21! 66 is a ripe old age for such a man to reach; but Fleisher has certainly blazed a new trail here. -R. Lanihorne

GODZILLA #16 (November)
"The Great Godzilla Roundup" by Doug Moench, Herb Trimpe & Dan Green

Okay, so I was wrong. Everyone makes mistakes sometimes. I said that this mag couldn't go anywhere, and would always be boring and dull and predictable, and so forth. Well, that was how it looked at the time...
I was wrong.
No-one's perfect... -K. Williams

MADE IN AMERICA

BY HOWARD P. SIEGEL

SUPER-HEROES ARE BIG BUSINESS

This issue of Bem, I'd like to tell you about a phenomenon that has once again occurred in the United States -- the outburst of the super-hero into the commercial world. But first, a brief history of this "fringe benefit" some artists enjoy when their creations become popular. The first noticeable use of a cartoon character who could fill the majority of requirements entitling him to the category of "super-hero" was, believe it or not, POPEYE. Super strength, constantly fighting his evil adversaries -- he fit. Outside Lubbock, Texas, the spinach-growing capital of the USA, a statue of Popeye was erected; games, soap, toys, and naturally a brand of spinach bore his name and/or picture in the mid-1930s. Other examples from that era were TARZAN bread, BUCK ROGERS futuristic ray guns and toys, and, just at the close of the decade, some SUPERMAN merchandise. The 1940s presented a plethora of CAPTAIN MARVEL and SUPERMAN commercial material, as many

collectors of such things are well aware. The 50s were rather quiet, except for a slow, steady, continuous use of Superman, the all-time leader based on longevity. Then came the mid sixties...
I was personally involved with the "BATMAN CRAZE" of 1966-67. Originally scheduled for the Fall, 1967 TV season, the programme was put into the line-up unexpectedly in January of that year as a replacement. Prior to that, Licensing Corp. of America was hired by National Periodical Publications to launch a large commercial campaign to tie merchandise in with the programme. So successful was the effort that when the final tally was taken, well over 1400 different items ranging from pillow cases to lampshades and candy bore the name and image of the Caped Crusader and Boy Wonder. However, the early programming on TV caught many manufacturers far behind schedule in completing tooling for their items. Many were forced to cancel their plans, or produce and sell during the waning days of the "craze". "Never again", shouted many industries. There were victims from the comic-books as well; the MARVEL SUPER-HEROES were stalemated in the commercial world, along with Batman's fellow JLA members AQUAMAN and FLASH. Both publishers tried to join the bandwagon by shilling their stables in a like manner to Batman--they were unsuccessful. Even SUPERMAN was hard-pressed by the negative onus created by the inundation of items that bewildered the buying public. New and old publishers entered with many titles featuring super-heroes, and they all sold well for a time--the consumer couldn't get enough. Harvey revived their Thriller series, reprinting some excellent filler stories by Al Williamson and Reed Crandall; MLJ (under the corporate name of Radio Comics) brought back the likes of The Shield, Black Hood and Steel Sterling in an over-camp manner; Tower gave us some Wally Wood creations in T.H.U.N.D.E.R. and UNDERSEA Agents; Charlton had its heyday when Dick Giordano as editor expanded its Action Hero line with THUNDERBOLT, JUDOMASTER, PEACEMAKER and the "new" CAPTAIN ATOM and BLUE BEETLE. Several new publishers entered the field with one or two short lived titles--Lightning offered FATMAN, THE HUMAN FLYING SAUCER, created by C.C. Beck in his inimitable Captain Marvel style as an overweight hero dressed in a green and gold version of the "Big Red Cheese" costume, who could turn into a flying saucer at will. M.E. Enterprises gave us a so-called "Captain Marvel" who could split into five parts, being an android. He was put out of business by Marvel Comics in the courts -- poor Captain Marvel, he can never free himself of legal entanglements!

The early 1970s saw a steady series of Saturday morning children's cartoon shows featuring superheroes, some from the comics, others created especially for the medium. They became extremely popular, and soon some manufacturers of consumer products began to license their use. Vitamins, the ever popular T-shirts, book covers, school stationery, a few toys and games. Television was, during that time, the fosterer of the commercial possibilities of super-heroes; by the middle of the decade the toy counters were endowed with a super-abundance of such character merchandising, showing that the public will always be image conscious. Both DC and Marvel could be recognised as joint leaders in this, but Stan Lee was now warming up for the bigger pot of gold.

We've now come almost to the present...1977-78. The doors to prime time sophistication in television were opened. In walked pilots for Spider-Man and The Hulk -- both received good Neilsen ratings, and the Hulk has obtained a regular slot, with Spider-Man probable to follow. Wonder Woman preceded them by a season, and there has been talk of shows involving many others. This has both advantages and disadvantages. Increased sales, of course, is a plus to any business manager--but the other side of the coin, as experienced before, is that there is a tendency to change the comic-book version of the character to suit his TV image. This, more times than not, has led to a downgrading of the subject's viability in the comics; it has happened to Batman, Wonder Woman and Aquaman, and did no good to Captain Marvel.

Finally, we open the Sunday newspapers and find that BLONDIE, BEETLE BAILEY, PEANUTS and DICK TRACY have new neighbours. Depending on the tabloid, it could be SPIDER-MAN, HOWARD THE DUCK, SUPER HEROES (the JLA), or if one wants to stretch a point, the Gil Kane-Ron Goulart entry, STAR HAWKS. Where comic-book heroes failed previously, they seem to be succeeding this time around; this is where the big money is. Not only will the comic-book propagate and flourish as a result of such mass media exploitation, but it assures financially profitable residuals to the publishers. I remember the occasion when Warner Communications bought the Kinney Corporation, who had previously purchased National Periodical Publications. The board of directors of the new parent company met to vote on the question of discontinuing comic-book publication as not being profitable enough, retaining only SUPERMAN and BATMAN and the like for their commercial value. The vote was close--we are enjoying (?) DC Comics today by the slim margin of two positive votes.

We can expect a world-wide exploitation of the super-hero merchandising and exploitation trends with the SUPERMAN movie a potent leader toward that end. For your interest, let me cite some statistics which appeared in my "Comic Collector's Comments" column for RBCC not too long ago: "When the (Superman) movie opens in 1978, some 120 licenses and large numbers of retail stores in every major city in America will be officially carrying SUPERMAN merchandise, according to Market Communications magazine, a leading journal dealing with such matters. Meanwhile, Stan Lee is negotiating with Columbia Pictures, offering the entire Marvel stable, not just piecemeal characters. Ivan Schneider, previously a vice-president of Cadence Industries, Marvel's parent company, left to create his own business, Superhero Enterprises. He now operates two stores and plans to grant franchises in Maryland, Delaware, Pennsylvania and Washington, D.C." Like professional sports, comic-book superheroes are no longer doing their thing for Mom, America and apple pie. They're keeping an acute eye on Wall Street. And that means: Super-heroes are BIG business... -HPS

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ASTONISHING TALES ≠8 @ 80p; CONAN ≠40 @ £1, ≠56 @ 75p; DAREDEVIL ≠43 @ 50p, ≠109 @ 50p; GIANT-SIZE FANTASTIC FOUR ≠2 @ £1; G-S MAN-THING ≠5 @ £5; G-S SUPERHEROES ≠1 @ £1; MARVEL PREMIERE ≠17-18 @ 50p; OUR FIGHTING FORCES (Kirby art in all) ≠151-153, 156-158, 162 @ 25p each; SWAMP THING ≠9 @ 50p; THOR ≠223, 224 @ 75p each.

ASTONISHING TALES (Deathlok) ≠25 @ 30p, 26-28, 30 & 34 @ 25p; CONAN ≠43-49 @ 25p, ≠51-53 @ 20p, ≠57-63 & 65 @ 15p; DR STRANGE ≠4 @ 25p, ≠5-9, 11-15 @ 20p; HOWARD THE DUCK ≠2, 3 @ 75p, 4, 5 @ 50p, 6, 7 @ 40p, 8, 9 @ 30p, 10, 11 @ 25p, 12, 13 @ 20p; STRANGE TALES (Warlock) ≠178 @ 30p, 179-181 @ 25p; WARLOCK ≠2 @ £1, 9-14 @ 25p.

MARVEL BLACK & WHITE MAGAZINES

SAVAGE SWORD OF CONAN ≠1 @ £2, 2-5 @ 75p, 7-8 @ 60p; SAVAGE TALES (Conan) ≠4, 5 @ £1; UNKNOWN WORLDS OF SCIENCE FICTION ≠1 @ £1, 2, 3 @ 75p.

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COMICBOOK MARKETPLACE DECEMBER 16th

Lyndhurst Hall, Warden Road, Kentish Town, London, N.W.3.

The Comicbook Marketplace is not only the place to pick up those 'hard to find' back issues and latest imports but also somewhere where you can meet fellow fans and see old friends. If you hate marts that are vast and impersonal then the Comicbook Marketplace is for you.

Come along on December 16th, we'll have over thirty tables stacked with over 100,000 comics, posters, portfolios, fanzines, black and white magazines and many other comics related items from Britain's top comics dealers. Doors open midday, see you there.

DEALERS

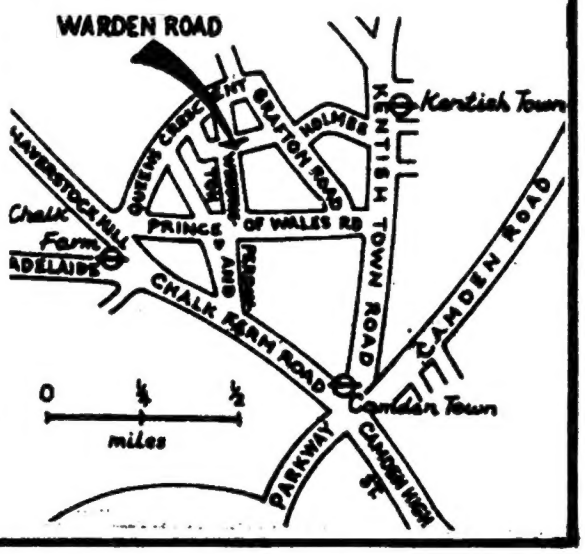
A limited number of both centre and wall positioned tables are available. Wall tables are £4.50 and centre tables are £3.50. Send your booking to:

Rob Barrow,
Fantasy Domain

Please enclose an S.A.E. for confirmation.

HOW TO GET THERE

UNDERGROUND to Chalk Farm, Camden Town or Kentish Town. BUS numbers 27, 134, 137, 214, to Kentish Town or 3, 27, 29, 31, 53, 68, 74, 253, to Chalk Farm/Camden Town.



SIGH

So, I've now done a year of 'Sigh'--what do I do for an encore? Another year? Well, why not! (Answers on a postcard, please...)

But before I embark on another term of office (what d'you mean, "who re-elected me"?), I'd just like to pause and consider: why am I doing this? And why are you reading it? You are reading it? Oh good, I'm not the only nutter around here... Why, in fact, do we devote so much of our time, our efforts, our resources, and ourselves, to comics? Eh? Because we enjoy them? Is it really as simple as that?

Indulge me a while as I reflect...

Just at present I'm engaged in the mammoth task of re-reading my entire collection of comic mags. Bearing in mind that this encompasses some 8000 items (mainly DC & Marvel, but also a handful of Atlas, Charlton, and sundry junk), and that my free hours per week that aren't currently spoken for can be counted on the fingers of two hands, I think you'll appreciate that this project could take some little time--but it is a very rewarding experience. Sitting down and reading 200 or so issues of a given mag (such as Action or Adventure, that is...obviously not all that many mags have notched up 200 issues) gives one an interesting and helpful perspective, not only in regard to the changes that have taken place in that mag over the years (you can see over a long period not just how it's changed, but why), but also to the changes in the world around and outside comics. However, looking back over all that time (in some cases 20 years), there does seem to be one thing that hasn't changed--the fundamental nature and function of comics. Escape (of course), entertainment (obviously), but, most of all, hope...

When you're young and small and helpless (I still am, I don't know about you), the world can be a pretty hope-stifling place. You're brought up to believe in truth, justice, liberty, the pursuit of happiness, etc, but, unless you're very fortunate, you'll find around you things like lies, injustice, compulsion, unhappiness... and often seemingly without any redress. How can you find the strength to carry on under such conditions? Faith helps of course--I myself was brought up a believing Christian (something I still am, in my own way)--but it's more comforting if you've got something tangible for support. Such as comic mags? Yes, such as comic mags.

In the comics there is also crime, injustice, bullying, greed, and thoughtlessness, just like in the "normal" world -- but we can also see the other side of things, that we don't necessarily see in the real world; the prevention or solving of crimes, reparation of injustice, the bitter harvest that greed can bring, the suffering that comes to those who cause others to suffer...in a word, hope. Not the facile and ultimately disappointing hope of Utopia, but the hope that's based on the idea of balance.

I think it was represented best in the Deadman series, with the concept of Rama Kushna, the deity whose function it was to secure balance in the world -- that is, balance between good and evil, peace and war, harmony and discord, etc. Not total victory of 'good' over 'evil', since as part of the inherent balance of things all 'good' contains some 'evil', just as all 'evil' contains some spark of good (a concept common to various religions); I think it's been this creed, more than anything else, which has helped sustain me through times of trial and tribulation.

Now of course you may point out that there have been comic mags without any noticeable hope or optimism to them-- dark, doomy tales of supernatural forces treating humankind as helpless pawns, with monstrous 'heroes' only winning an occasional skirmish and rarely a battle, let alone the war. Yes, indeed there have been...a couple even lasted longer than a year. But the nearest thing to those that still survives today is the weakened Tomb of Dracula, and even that finally started incorporating little twinklings of hope. It is a necessary element -- maybe you can have entertainment without it, but hardly escape.

So is that the reason I do this? By way of gratitude to, or celebration of, or in deference to, this sense of hope whereof I speak?

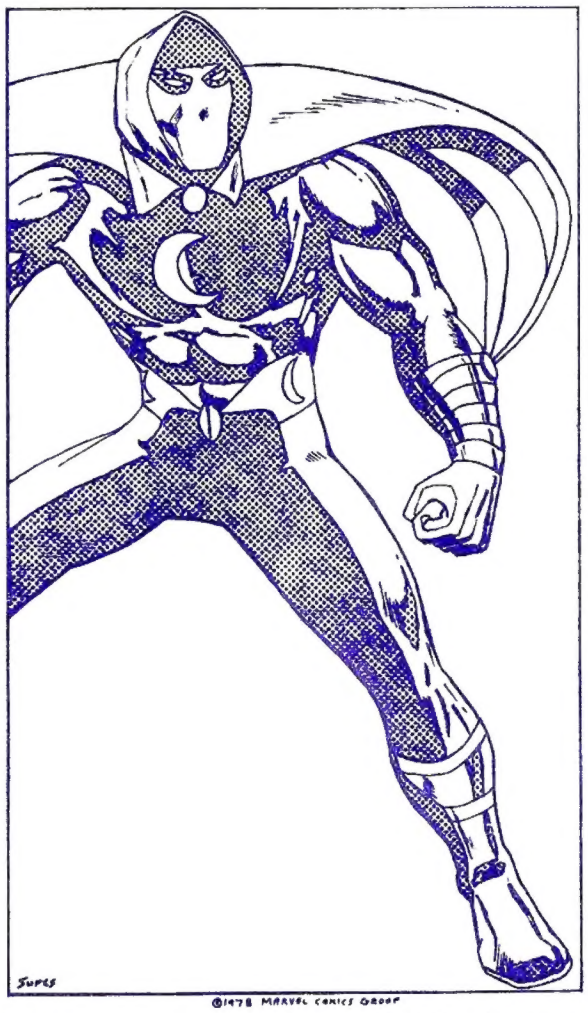
Well, partly. But the main reason is still that I enjoy comics. Now, this may come as a surprise to some of my critics, who are wont to suggest that my main object in life is slagging them. Not so. I wouldn't take the trouble to criticise what I think is wrong with them if it weren't that I cared so strongly about them. Comics surprisingly weren't my first love -- I was reading books and watching TV before I first got into comics (yes, Virginia, there was TV back in those dim distant days)--but they've always been my greatest. (Save perhaps for... But that needn't concern you...)

And, because I enjoy reading comics, I also enjoy reading about them, though sometimes some of the things that are written about them strike me as somewhat unfair, which prompts me to put pen (or rather typewriter) to paper in their defence. Or alternatively it might seem to me that praise of a particular comic or vogue is unjustified or excessive, and I'd decide to put that into print. But to be honest the main reason I write is the same as for reading--I enjoy it.

And really, even if it isn't just as simple as that, I reckon that in itself is enough reason to continue.

I'll be here again next time. Hope you will be too.

-K. WILLIAMS



MOON KNIGHT

Right there in the name you have it... MOON KNIGHT. The moon, under which lovers have kissed and vampires have croaked, and the knight, the invader, defender, avenger, but always a gallant charging into battle, his lady's favour tied round his armoured bicep. The name of the game's romance, and the ball's in Moon Knight's court. Of course that twerp Jack Norris ain't hip to it (DEFENDERS 48), but Scorpio's in tune with our silver and black clad warrior:

"Let the man go to his death with style...with a little bit of class. That's what's missing from the world these days...class!"

CLASS! Class is: John Kline dropping a GANGSTER in the path of an oncoming barge, then tossing in an old tire as wreath. James Bond scattering flowers on the corpse of a guy whose neck he's just broken, whilst SPECTRE thugs are busting down the door. A silver half-moon calling card. Maybe not always sweetness and light images, but then that's class, the first weapon of a con-man, the ability to commit the atrocious crime and get away with it. Perhaps it's got something to do with the sense of balance.

Don't get me wrong, I'm not talking about the agility of this prizefighter turned commando turned mercenary, heightened to a supernatural degree by the bite of Marvel's favourite Werewolf By Night. When I talk about balance, I mean the way this guy can juggle three ID's and get away with it. It's not easy, y'know, being a cabbie called Lockley, a playboy called Grant and a superhero called Moon Knight, but somehow he gets away with it. However preposterous he may seem at first, I suppose writer Doug Moench has given us something he's quite familiar with... the driven man.

I can believe in a pug who chucks in the ring. The pay may be good, but there are too many rules --so he becomes a Marine, and finds the confines of Uncle Sam a drag. Even as a mercenary he's missing something, even in the fight for freedom, though "That's the kind of fight I support!" (WBN 33). The trouble with revolutions is that rebels so often become tyrants, their seats become too accustomed to the plush cushions of power. He proves he's not an unthinking thug by saving his blood-money, building it into a fortune, creating new identities. That's part of it, the option to cut out of your responsibilities by becoming someone else, but he's still not sure what he's looking for.

It comes in the shape of THE COMMITTEE, a gang of businessmen, overweight blimps but armed with their Universal City popguns and after a werewolf which they can keep as a "pet" (a.k.a. slave). It all gels whilst Moon Knight is watching the wolfman straining at the bars to be free -- the fat cats are gloating, werewolf's sister is taunting him. Suddenly he realises that he wants no part of young girls hating him, no part of oppression, no part of palling with people he despises. He frees the Werewolf, and launches into the fight with the zeal of the newly converted.

"The Moon Knight seemed to get a kick out of it, battling like some gayblade swashbuckler straight from Errol Flynn country" (Jack Russell) --the Knight's so enthusiastic, and this is something I like about him. He's having fun and he figures everyone's going to feel the same way, and he can't get over his surprise when the werewolf turns on him.

"Where's your sense of cameraderie?" he demands before cutting out, in the hope that Wolfy will also find what he's looking for.

The Moon Knight has found romance; Massa Britt and Kato, the One Who Knows what evil lurks in the heart of men, and the guy who wants to strike fear into the hearts of cowardly criminals, they have all got that certain something, that touch of class that I see in Moon Knight. Don Perlin drew MK's two-parter in the style of Steve Ditko, but whilst the guy has the Marvel touch, he's no Spider-Man. This guy's positive, a winner, a guy who was trained to think of The Enemy as targets, and hit them with self-entertaining abuse.

"Motormouth...pansy" it's all the same to him, without the malevolence of Spidey's more good-natured taunts because, unlike the Web-Slinger, he couldn't care less who or what he's up against --it's still The Enemy, and he's out to stop them.

In some ways, especially in the identification with Batman, Moon Knight resembles Nighthawk, but dare I say it, I feel Moon Knight's the stronger character. Unlike Nighthawk, he's found what he was searching for; superdoing is the End, not the Means, and I think that makes him all the more interesting.

-GRAEME BASSETT

MOON KNIGHT: first appeared in WEREWOLF BY NIGHT #32 and #33; he graduated to a two-issue try-out in MARVEL SPOTLIGHT #28 and #29, then to issues 47-51 of DEFENDERS, followed, with any luck, by a back-up strip in HULK MAGAZINE #11.

UNAMERICAN ACTIVITIES

It's annual time again, folks; since I gave the whole scene (and my wallet) a thorough going-over last year in Bem-16, I won't go into great detail -- just have a look some time when you're in a shop! The standard price for most of them this year is £1.50 -- as usual, the ones from Stafford Pemberton are very weak, art-wise --the World Distributors "Emergency" reprints some strips done for Charlton by the Adams studio, while at Brown & Watson fan artist David Lloyd turns in some nice art on "Logan's Run" (my opinion; Stephen Bailey in the Review Section isn't as impressed). There are annuals for Action, Batman, Valiant, The Muppet Show, Misty, Spider-Man, Hotspur, Desperate Dan, and I even saw a "Return of the Saint" annual on sale in Foyles before the TV series had started!

Two annuals I have bought though are 2000 A.D. (£1.10 for 128 pages, 16 in colour) and DAN DARE (£1.35 for 96 pages, 32 in colour); they sport rather similar covers by Kev O'Neill, and inside they're both pretty much out of the same mould. Dan Dare is in 2000 A.D. -- and other 2000 A.D. stories are in Dan Dare.

It's a shame that neither book gives artist & writer credits; 2000 A.D. includes Mach One, Dan Dare, Judge Dredd, Invasion, the Harlem Heroes, a couple of rather unoriginal future shocks, and reprints including the Phantom Patrol; Dan Dare leads off his own annual with a 12-page colour story drawn by Ian Kennedy, and also has the 8-page story (scripted by Richard Burton) of how the old Dan Dare became the new Dan Dare, plus a 7-page colour Judge Dredd tale drawn by Kevin O'Neill, Invasion, and a few non-series stories, as well as a Rick Random "blast from the past", reprinting 59 digest-size pages onto 15. I'd be hard-pressed to choose between the two books, but Dan Dare has the better art--if they had less text and photo filler material I'd be happier. 96 and 62 pages of strip respectively is not full use of resources, I feel!

I wonder if STARLORD will have an annual next year? I'm really very sad that it has finished now--it was a quality package, showing more respect for the medium than the pulp paper format of other adventure comics. So Ro-Busters and Strontium Dog continue--but Mind Wars ends. That was a strip I wasn't too keen on at first --but it's grown, expanded, matured. I'll miss it; Alan Hebden is a name to watch.

I must admit I was a bit put off by AMAZING ROCK & ROLL ADVENTURES--but I did finally buy it. After all, it is the sixth and final issue of BRAINSTORM COMIX. My reward was to discover a 23-page extravaganza by Mr Bryan Talbot, "The Omega Report", including a cameo appearance by Chester P. Hackenbush, and building to a climax that makes "Close Encounters" look like "Sale of the Century". Bonk and Hunt Emerson are also on hand to give you your 50p worth; if you're missing any issues of Brainstorm, try to find them now before the prices start to climb!

LOOK-IN has added another page of strips, to make 12½ in total; in colour there's The Six Million Dollar Man by Martin Asbury and The Bionic Woman by John Bolton, in black & white there's the Benny Hill Page, half a page of "Gerry Anderson's Starcruiser", two pages of The Famous Five by M. Noble, two pages of Doctor on the Go, two pages of Logan's Run

by Arthur Ranson, and, as of issue 38, a page of Smurfs by Peyo. There are actually two albums of Smurf adventure around now too, in the familiar Asterix, Lucky Luke, Hagar, Tintin etc format. "King Smurf" is volume one; "The Smurfette" comes next, again a 40-page story for 95p. They are both quite amusing--smurf for yourself.

I imagine you'll have seen CASTLE OF HORROR and TALES OF TERROR, 64 page (for 35p) monthly black & white magazines from Portman Distribution, reprinting Marvel horror stories; if you missed the tales the first time around, you've another chance to do it again! CoH has Lilith and Morbius, plus non-series stories, while ToT has Brother Voodoo and The Zombie--none of the stories are the origins, so this may be random sampling. Previous similar British editions of this ilk, such as NIGHTMARE and EERIE, have never stayed around long...

But I'm supposed to talk about Tintin; well, I've read "Tintin in Tibet" and "Red Sea Sharks", which both give good value at 62 pages for around 85 pence, and I enjoyed them both, and intend to seek out more some time. Both Hergé's script and art are a pleasant blend of humour and realism, and if you haven't encountered the series before, I can only suggest you see if they appeal to you. -RUAN LANIHORNE